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TO

THE REV. JOHN RILAND, M. A.

CURATE OF YOXALL;

AS

A MEMORIAL OF THE FRIENDSHIP,

CEMENTED AND CONFIRMED

BY A UNION OF SENTIMENT AND OF OBJECT

IN THE DISCHARGE

OF THEIR ASSOCIATED PASTORAL DUTIES,

DURING SEVENTEEN YEARS;

THE AUTHOR

AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBES

THIS SEVENTH VOLUME

OF

PRACTICAL AND FAMILIAR

SERMONS.

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SERMON I.

THE CHARGE OF SIN UNIVERSAL.

ROMANS, iii. 22, 23.

There is no difference: for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

THESE words contain a most weighty and interesting statement; a statement which is true in respect to every one of us, and which it concerns every one of us to receive and admit as true; for otherwise it does not appear possible that we can be saved. We must ever bear in mind, that the Gospel of Jesus Christ, by which only we can be saved, comes to us as a remedy. This is the character which it takes, and in which it offers itself to us. It is a remedy for an evil, and, as is the case with other remedies, no one will willingly apply and use it, who is not sensible of the evil which it is designed to cure. "They that are whole need not a physician"— they value him not, they desire him not, they regard him not — "but they that are sick."

A man must feel his sickness before he will go to a physician, and ask and follow his advice. Now the evil, for which the Gospel provides a remedy, is Sin; and this evil must be felt before the remedy will be applied. It is from this cause that so many persons hear the Gospel, but receive it not. They seem to listen to it, but it makes no deep, no lasting impression on the heart. The reason is, they have never been convinced of sin; they have never felt that they are sinners. When asked, indeed, if they are sinners, they are ready to make an unmeaning sort of confession on the subject. They *say*, they *own* that they are sinners; but they do not *feel* themselves to be sinners. They have never been condemned for sin in their own hearts, nor have felt the sentence of death in themselves, because of their transgressions. Where, then, is the wonder that, being in such a state, they should hear the Gospel with comparative indifference and unprofitableness? Nay, how is it possible that they should hear it otherwise? Not being sensible of the burden of sin, is it possible that they should value and accept the offer of deliverance from it? Not feeling the guilt of sin, is it possible that they should use the means provided for washing it away? No: there must be first a conviction of sin. A sense of guilt, a feeling of condemnation

must lie at the bottom of real Christianity; and there can be no real Christianity, but such as is built upon this foundation. To produce, then, conviction of sin in the hearts of his hearers, must be one part of the Minister's office. While he preaches to them the Gospel, and points it out to them as a remedy for the wounded conscience, he must endeavour first to wound, in order to lead them afterwards to the remedy. And in what manner can he attempt this with greater probability of success, than by setting before them the plain and clear declarations of Scripture on this subject: which, if really believed as true, cannot fail of accomplishing the object? Of this kind is the declaration in the text. St. Paul, speaking by the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of Truth also, expressly says, that "there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God:" words which declare, as plainly as words can speak, the guilt and condemnation of every child of Adam: words, therefore, which if received into the heart as true, must produce conviction of sin. It is, then, with this view, that I will now use these words. I will endeavour, my brethren, by them, to convince *you* of sin.—Only let me premise one thing. When I talk of convicting you of sin, let it not be supposed that I think of producing this effect

in my own strength, or by my own power. No: I cannot convince you of sin. Conviction is the work of the Holy Spirit alone. Our Saviour himself promised, that when "the Spirit was come, *He* should convince the world of sin." This is one part of that gracious office which He fulfils in the salvation of sinners. Through his powerful agency on the soul, He convinces them of sin. But it is by the Word that He begins and carries on this work in the heart. The Word, written in the Scriptures, and explained and enforced by the preachers of the Gospel, is the instrument which He generally employs for producing conviction of sin. It is solely, then, in dependance on his power, that I attempt this work. May He now be present with us, and bring home with power this Word unto our hearts! "There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

In considering this passage, let us attend,

I. To the *Charge* here brought.

II. To the *Persons* against whom it is brought.

III. To the *Extent* in which it is brought.

I. The Charge here brought is that of *having sinned*, and a most solemn and awful charge it is. "Fools," indeed, "make a mock at sin;" and that they do so, is a proof

of their folly. For surely no one in his senses could mock at that which in itself is so serious and momentous a concern. Let us remember that St. John describes sin to be the transgression of God's law; that holy, just, and good law, which in fact is the mind and will of God himself. God is love. His nature is love: and consequently His law, requires love. Love is the fulfilling of the law. To love God with all the heart, and their fellow-beings as themselves, is the essence of that law which God has prescribed to all his moral and intelligent creatures. This is the law which he originally gave to the holy angels. This is the law which he at first gave to man. In the keeping of this law their happiness consists, and so long as they act in obedience and conformity to it, they fulfil the purposes for which they were created.

But to break this law is sin: and sin produces only misery and ruin.—When some of the angels ceased to love and obey God, they sinned; and through their sin were cast out of heaven. When Adam broke the commandment which was given to him, and which, being given to him by God, became a part of his holy law, he sinned; and through his sin was cast out of Paradise. We see in these two instances what sin is, and what it has done. Surely there is nothing in this

view of sin which might induce us to trifle with it. To charge a person with having sinned is no light accusation: for it is to charge him with being a transgressor of the good and holy law of his Creator: it is to charge him with having acted contrary to the purpose for which he was made; with having failed to love and obey the best and greatest of Beings: it is to charge him with being guilty of the same conduct with that which cast the fallen angels out of heaven, and fallen man out of Paradise. Surely this is a solemn charge. Do we want other examples of this truth — other proofs of the malignity of sin, of the evil of having sinned? Why was the flood of waters brought in upon the inhabitants of the old world? Because they had sinned. Why was fire rained down out of heaven upon the people of Sodom and Gomorrah? Because they had sinned. Why were the Egyptians desolated with plagues, and Pharaoh and his host overthrown in the Red Sea? Because they had sinned. Why were the nations of Canaan exterminated by the sword of Israel? Because they had sinned. Or, to give one still more aweful and decisive example on this subject, why did the Son of God die on the cross? Why was the Lord of Life and Glory buffeted, reviled, scourged, crowned with thorns, crucified, and slain? Because He had taken upon himself the nature and the cause

of sinners. Because He had put himself in the place of sinners, and had permitted himself to be charged with sin, even their sin. It is here, my brethren, in this sight, in the spectacle of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God, suffering for sin, enduring the shame and agony, the cross and passion, that we may best see and learn the meaning of the Charge in the text. He admitted the charge, though He had not committed the act, and we see what the admission of it cost him. What, then, will it cost those, who have committed the act, and, however they may deny, yet cannot disprove the charge? However fools may now make mock at sin; however lightly men may now esteem the transgression of God's law; yet doubtless to be charged with having sinned is a most weighty charge, and one which ought to fill those against whom it is preferred with the most lively apprehension and alarm. Such, however, is the Charge brought in the text. We consider,

II. The *Persons* against whom it is brought.

"There is no difference: for all have sinned."

"*All, all* have sinned." — The Charge is universal. It is brought against the whole human race; against every child and descendant of Adam. "All have sinned;" all in him, their progenitor and representative; and all who live, and grow up, in their own persons also. All have sinned in Adam; for

in "Adam all die." Death, which is the wages of sin, hath passed upon all men; which shews that they have all sinned: for even infants, those "who have not sinned (as the Apostle expresseth it) after the similitude of Adam's transgression"—that is, personally, actually, knowingly, wilfully—even these die as well as others; which confirms the declaration of Scripture, that "they are by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath."—In this sense the charge of having sinned is brought against *them.*

But (what is more to our purpose) with far greater clearness and force is it brought against those who live and act for themselves. They are all sinners in their own persons; and against them the Charge in the text is preferred without any exception; for they "all have sinned." When we call to mind the nature of the Charge, as it has been explained under the former head, we may possibly deem this to be a hard saying. Are all men chargeable with sin, the commission of which cast the angels out of Heaven, and Adam out of Paradise; nay, even the very admission of which brought the Son of God to the cross? Yes, my brethren, so says the text. "There is no difference: for *all* have sinned." They are not my words; but the words of the Holy Ghost: while the same or similar expressions occur in many other places. Only a few

verses before the text, the Apostle had been shewing, that "*every* mouth must be stopped, and *all the world* become guilty before God." And in the Epistle to the Galatians we find it expressly said, that "the Scripture hath concluded *all* under sin:" agreeably with the declaration in another place, that "there is none righteous, no, not one;" and "that Jews and Gentiles are proved to be all under sin." — But this is a truth, against which nature and reason will struggle as long as they can. It is a truth unpalatable to the pride of man. And under the influence of this principle, he will be disposed yet further to ask, 'What, is there no difference? no 'difference between one man and another? 'between the good and the bad? between 'righteous Abel, and wicked Cain, who slew 'him? between the rebellious and obstinate 'Pharaoh, and the meek and obedient Moses? 'between the impenitent Saul, and the broken-'hearted, contrite David? between Judas 'who betrayed his Master, and the eleven 'apostles who loved and honoured him? 'between the Jews who crucified Christ, and 'the pious women who followed and minis-'tered unto him? Is there no difference 'between these persons? Have they all 'equally sinned? Are they all equally guilty 'before God?' — My brethren, in these questions two things, which in themselves are

distinct and separate, are confounded together. *In one sense*, all these persons, whom we have been naming, are *not* alike. They have not all sinned *in the same manner, in the same measure, to the same degree. Here* there is *a* difference, and *a wide* difference, between them. But *in another sense*, in the sense spoken of in the text, they *are* all alike. They have all sinned; and *here* there is no difference. Though they may not be equally guilty, yet they are all guilty before God. The charge brought against them in the text is true to *the extent* in which it is intended to be brought. They "all have sinned" to the extent therein stated. For the further clearing, then, of the subject, let us consider,

III. The *Extent* of the Charge here brought.

It is contained in the concluding words of the text. "For all have sinned, *and come short of the glory of God.*" This latter clause is immediately connected with the former, and serves to define and limit its meaning. "All have sinned, and" by so doing "have come short of the glory of God." They have not all sinned alike or equally, in the same way, or to the same degree; but they have all *so* sinned as to "come short of the glory of God." Now this expression may be understood as having two significations. It signifies,

First, To fall short of rendering to God that glory to which He is entitled. He expects and requires that all his creatures shall glorify Him. He has created them for his glory: and when they fulfil the purpose for which he created them, then they do glorify Him. Thus "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work." The Power, the Wisdom, and the Goodness of the Almighty are seen in the various works of creation; in that order which they all observe, and in those benefits and blessings which they diffuse around them. The regular movements of the heavenly bodies, the return of day and night, the succession of the seasons, the fruits of the earth, the birds of the air, the animals, the insects — all proclaim the Glory of God, by clearly exhibiting the glorious perfections of Him, who made, preserves, and sustains them all; and by fulfilling the different ends and purposes for which they were designed.—What, then, was the end and purpose for which man was made? To love, obey, and serve his Maker; to render to Him, according to the powers and faculties conferred on him, a moral, a spiritual service and obedience; to keep his holy law; and to love Him with all the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength. This was the work which man was created to per-

form; and in performing it, he would have rendered to God the glory which he required: while, on the other hand, not to perform this work assigned to him, would be to deprive God of his glory. It would be to dishonour Him, by introducing disorder and confusion into his works; as much as if the sun should object to shine, or the moon or the stars should refuse to rise and set at his command. By making such an opposition to his will, they would come "short of the glory of God." But of making such an opposition *they* are not capable: for they have no power to disobey the law of God. But man *is* capable of disobedience; and is guilty of it. He has power to break the law of his Creator, and he has broken it. This is the use which he has made of his superior faculties. Man, a living, rational, intelligent being, is placed, not like the other works of creation, under a law of necessity which he *cannot* break; but under a moral restraint, by which he ought to be kept in the path of duty. But he is not so kept by it. His depraved will and evil inclinations lead him astray from duty, and teach him to find his pleasure in transgressing the law of his Creator; and in so doing he "comes short of the glory of God;" he dishonours God in his very gifts; and endeavours, according to his

power, to introduce confusion into His works, and to defeat His great and gracious designs. — *So far*, then, to *this extent*, " all have sinned." Every sin is a departure from duty, a coming short of the end for which man was created. Every sin, therefore, dishonours God; and every sinner by every transgression tends to deprive him of his glory. He " comes short of the glory of God."

This expression signifies,

Secondly, The coming short of, or the failing to obtain, that glory which God originally designed for man. That God did originally design man for a glorious immortality there can be no question. All his powers and faculties fitted him for such an immortality; and had he continued holy and obedient, he would doubtless have been admitted to that eternal glory, of which the tree of life in Paradise was a symbol and a pledge. But by sin he fell short of that glory: in other words, he forfeited and lost it. — This, indeed, was the consequence of not rendering to God the glory due to Him. Having been unwilling to glorify God, he could no longer expect to be glorified with God. The sin, which had dishonoured God, shut out the sinner from his favour and presence. This was represented to Adam by the " cherubims and the flaming sword, which turned every way to keep the way of

the tree of life." By this significant emblem he was taught, that by disobedience he had shut the gate of Heaven against himself; that through his transgression he was deprived of a title to eternal life; that by having sinned, he was "come short of the glory of God." And so *far then*, to *this extent* have all men sinned. By sin they have forfeited eternal life, and have lost their hope of heaven. They have dishonoured God their Creator by their disobedience, and by so doing have excluded themselves from glory.

And here, then, we may now see the full meaning and extent of the Charge alleged in the text. "All have sinned and have come short of the glory of God." Whatever may be the comparative degree of guilt between different persons; whether one may have sinned more flagrantly than another; whatever may be the shade or complexion of one man's sins when contrasted with those of some other man: whether one may have sinned more openly; and another more secretly; whether one may have done more injury to society than another may have done — all these several points are nothing *as to the case before us.* Notwithstanding these variations and degrees in their modes and measures of sin, yet in *one respect* "there is no difference;" all have so sinned as to have come

short of the glory of God. All, without any exception, by their sins have dishonoured God, and have shut themselves out from heaven. One sentence lies against them all. They have sinned, and have lost their hope of glory.

And is *this* the declaration of Scripture itself? Is *this* the Word of the living God? Is it true of all men, that they have sinned, and have come short of the glory of God? Is it true of righteous Abel, no less than of wicked Cain? Is it true of Moses, no less than of Pharaoh—of the eleven apostles, no less than of Judas the traitor—of the followers of Jesus, no less than of his murderers? Is it true of all these persons, that they have sinned, and have come short of the glory of God? Then it is true of us, my brethren,—of all of us; of every person here present, of rich and poor, of male and female, of old and young. "We all have sinned, and have come short of the glory of God." There is, in this respect, "no difference." It matters not *what* our course or line of sin may have been. As the Prophet says, "*all* we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned *every one to his own way.*" Yes: notice that expression, "*every one to his own way:*" not all alike, not all in the same way; but *every one to his own way;*—and in *that way* we have dishonoured God, and forfeited His favour. *In*

that way of sin, be it what course it may, which we have each chosen for ourselves, and followed, we have closed the gate of heaven against ourselves. "There is no difference" —all of us have sinned; and through sin are excluded from glory, and condemned to eternal death. Do these words sound harsh in your ears? Does the sentence seem unjust? O my brethren, let me again remind you that the words are not mine. They are the words of inspiration. The sentence is one which God has himself denounced. He has declared that all are guilty, and that every mouth shall be stopped before Him. This is *His* declaration, and *we* cannot alter it. Whether we believe it or not, still it is true: and whatsoever we may think of it now, we shall find it to be true hereafter. We shall find that our sins, whether, as we suppose, they may be many or few, great or little, have been sufficient to exclude us from heaven, and to sink us to hell.

Perhaps you are ready to say, 'Why this 'doctrine takes away all hope? Would you 'drive us to despair?' No, my brethren, not to a despair of salvation; but to such a despair as that to which Scripture would drive you, when it concludes all under sin; when it says, "all have sinned, and have come short of the glory of God;"—to a despair of justifying yourselves before God; of standing

on your own righteousness; of getting to heaven by your own works and merits and obedience — to a despair of ever getting thither at all, but by the one only revealed way, the way of faith in Jesus Christ. This is now the way to the Tree of life. The old way by works, by a sinless obedience, was closed for ever, as we have already noticed, when Adam fell. No sinner can ever pass that way. — But Christ has promised and disclosed a new and a living way — the way of faith. "He hath opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers;" and "by Him all that believe are justified from all things" — justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus." My brethren, receive and hold fast this great, this most important truth. You have "all sinned, and have come short of the glory of God." But in Christ there is a full and gracious pardon for all your sins; there is heaven opened to you afresh; there is glory offered to you again. Only confess your sins; acknowledge your guilt; say with a feeling, penitent soul, "we have sinned, we have come short of the glory of God;" and then, with a believing heart, look to, flee unto, rely upon the glorious, gracious Saviour; and through his grace walk henceforth in newness of life; and all will yet be well. Heaven will be yours; glory will be yours; every thing will be yours. Is this to

drive men to despair? Is this to take away all hope? Nay: it is to lead you to the only foundation of true hope—to the only remedy against despair. If we die in unrepented sin, despair will be our portion for ever. But if now we take Christ for our portion, we shall be filled here with peace and hope in believing; and hereafter our joy will be full. Say not, then, that I have shut you up under sin. I have not left you without disclosing a way of escape. May God of his mercy grant that you may not only see it, but may escape by it! "Flee to the stronghold, ye prisoners of Hope." Carry away with you in your hearts and memories the words of inspiration with which I am about to finish my discourse. "The Scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."

SERMON II.

RELIGION NOT A VAIN THING.

DEUTERONOMY, xxxii. 47.

For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life.

THESE were the words of Moses to Israel, and some of the last words with which he closed his long and affectionate ministry among them. The time was now drawing near, in which he was about to be taken from them, and to die on Mount Nebo. Previously, therefore, to his departure, he had been using all the means in his power to impress upon the people, whom he had conducted to the borders of the promised land, the great importance of obedience to God, and of faithfully keeping the covenant which he had graciously made with them. And, "having made an end of speaking all these words to all Israel, he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your

children to observe to do, all the words of this law:" and then he adds in the text, "for it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life." I need not tell you, my brethren, that it was religion of which Moses here speaks—true, real, practical religion;—which, according to his description of it, would consist in setting their hearts unto all the words which he had testified among them, and in commanding their children to do them; and of which he declares, "It is not a *vain* thing for you;" not a matter of little moment or concern; nay, rather, as the language would intimate, it is a matter of deep and lively interest to you; a thing in which you are most intimately concerned. And why? "Because it is your life;" because it is not a matter which you can neglect with safety: it is a matter of life and death; a matter, on which your very existence depends. If you attend to it, you will live. But if you reject it, death will be the consequence.

Such is the view which the text gives of religion; of religion, as Moses felt and spake of it in relation to the Israelites.—But let us remember that true religion is the same at all times, and to all people. The way in which it may be revealed, the light by which it may be accompanied, may vary under different dispensations; but the thing itself has always been the same, as to its nature, substance,

and importance. And as Moses said to the Israelites, so the Christian minister, when speaking of true religion, may say to his congregation — "It is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life." So that in discoursing on this passage we may consider it as containing two particulars —

I. A Statement respecting religion; and

II. A Reason in support of this statement.

May that Holy Spirit, whose office it is to open our understandings to understand the Scriptures, graciously vouchsafe us his blessing, while we meditate on the subjects here brought before our notice!

I. The Statement here given respecting religion is this — that "*It is not a vain thing for us.*" Previously, however, to considering this statement, it may be desirable briefly to advert to the description which Moses, as we have seen, gives of true religion in the passage connected with the text. According to this description, it consists "*in setting our hearts to all the words of God testified to us by his Prophets to observe and do them.*" This was religion in the days of Moses; and this, my brethren, is religion in our days. It is the setting of our heart to the Word of God to observe and do it. Religion consists of two parts, knowledge and practice: both of which are essential to it, and can neither of them be separated from each other. Knowledge

without practice can avail nothing; it only puffeth up: and practice without knowledge will be nothing more than a misguided zeal. A truly religious man must have a right knowledge of God, of His character and perfections; of the way in which He is to be approached with favour and acceptance; and of the duties and services which He requires of us. And having this knowledge, he must act consistently with it. He must have such feelings towards God as His character and perfections inspire; he must approach and draw near to Him in the way prescribed; and he must walk with Him in the duties and services required. Where, then, is the knowledge of these things to be procured, but from the Word of God? It is only as God has revealed Himself to us in His Word, that we can know *who* He is, and *how* He is to be approached and served by us. But in His Word, these things are fully and plainly told us. O my brethren, what cause have we to bless God for his Word! What reason is there that we should diligently and humbly read it; and set our hearts, as Moses says, to believe, obey, and practise it! *There* He discloses Himself to us as a just God, and yet a Saviour. *There* He proclaims His Name, and causes His goodness to pass before us. *There* He tells us, that He is a God glorious in holiness, infinitely just, and who will by

no means clear the guilty. *There* He also reveals Himself to us as God rich in mercy, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin — as God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing our iniquities unto us. *There* He manifests Himself as a God of mercy and love; graciously receiving every penitent sinner, who comes to Him through Jesus Christ; and enabling him, by the gifts and graces of His Spirit, to obey his holy law, and to live in newness of life. And here, then, we see what real religion is, and who is the really religious person. He is one, who sets his heart — that is, who by the Spirit of God is taught and enabled to set his heart — unto all the words which are testified in Scripture: who with the heart receives the testimony which he there finds written respecting God and Jesus Christ; the way of faith, and the way of holiness: who, believing these things, acts consistently with such a belief: who, as a lost and miserable sinner, casts himself on the mercies and promises of God in Jesus Christ; and, depending on a daily supply of the Spirit of grace to his soul, walks with God in an humble and constant endeavour to do His will, and to fulfil His holy law. Such is the religious man. Such, my brethren, is real religion — *that* religion, of which the text declares, that "It is not a vain thing for us;" not a light and trifling thing; a thing

of little esteem and value; a thing of slight importance and concern. Whether a man thus sets his heart unto the Word of God, to believe, obey, and follow it or not, is not a matter of indifference to him: "it is not a vain thing for him." And yet if we were to form our estimate of the value and importance of religion from the way in which it is too generally received and treated, we should have a very different opinion of it from that given in the text. The indifference, and even contempt, with which the invitations and promises of the Gospel are frequently heard, and the little respect and attention which are paid to its precepts and injunctions, shew, that men are apt to regard it as a *vain* thing. The persons in the parable, when bidden to the marriage-supper provided by the king, are said to *have "made light of it:"* because, instead of complying with the invitation, they began "with one consent to make excuse;" and on the most frivolous pretences to justify their non-attendance at the feast. And by what trifling excuses do men attempt to justify their neglect and disregard of religion! One person pleads the pleasures and amusements of the world, and another its cares and employments, as sufficient grounds for disobeying the precepts, or for slighting the calls, of the Gospel. It is the express command of Christ, that we should "seek first the king-

dom of God and His righteousness:" but men act in direct opposition to this command; and seek *first* the things of this world. 'We 'must attend' (they say) 'to the *main point*. 'As for religion, it is but a secondary con- 'cern. It will be time enough to provide for 'another life, after we have made a due pro- 'vision for this. — The Bible, indeed, says, '"Love not the world, neither the things of 'the world."— "Lay not up for yourselves 'treasures upon earth." — "Labour not for the 'meat which perisheth." But if we should 'literally follow these precepts, what is to 'become of ourselves and our families; of our 'trade, or our farm? Again, the word of God 'says, "Abstain from fleshly lusts." — "They 'that live in pleasure, are dead while they 'live." — "Deny yourself, take up your cross, 'and follow Christ." But if we comply with 'these injunctions, what is to become of our 'pleasures, and our worldly enjoyments? 'Shall we give up all these for the sake of 'religion? No: so long as we are in the 'world, let us have our pleasure in the world. 'It will be time enough to be melancholy 'and dull when we grow old or ill, and are 'preparing to die.' — This is the way, in which persons are continually reasoning, either openly or secretly, on this subject. And reasoning thus, while they betray their utter ignorance of the nature and excellence of

religion, they also shew the little, the no value which they themselves set on it. Speaking or thinking thus, they shew that they make light of it, and count it but a "vain thing." — But, my brethren, it is *not* a vain thing. Religion is *not* that secondary, worthless, unprofitable thing which men esteem it to be. The statement in the text positively contradicts any such supposition. Moses, speaking to the Israelites by the Spirit of God, says, "It is not a vain thing for you." And then, as a confirmation of his statement, he subjoins a reason in support of it; which is the second particular suggested in the text: — "It is not a vain thing for you:" and why? *Because*,

II. "It is your life." That religion, which men hold so cheap, and esteem so light, is in fact *their life*. — Let us enquire what this expression means.

The word *life* has several senses in Scripture. The most plain and obvious meaning is the literal one, in which it signifies the mere act of living; the state of being and existence in contradistinction to a state of death, or a ceasing to be. But it is clear that this is not the sense in which it is used in the text: because it cannot be truly said, in this sense, that religion is our life. There is no necessary connection between religion and the act of living: for men may live, and, alas! as we see, too many men do live, with-

out religion. They do not cease to live, because they have no religion. — But again, to *live* often signifies in the language of Scripture not merely to exist, but to answer the end for which we were brought into existence; to fulfil the purposes, and to experience the enjoyments, for which our being was given us. And in fact we do not *really live* unless we do these things. "To be spiritually minded (says the Apostle) is *life*"—it is the end and happiness of our existence. We were created for it; our true enjoyment consists in it; and without it we may be considered as dead rather than living. "Now we *live* (says the same Apostle to the Thessalonians) if ye stand fast in the Lord." *We live*, that is, we rejoice and triumph; we enjoy life with relish, and seem to live to some purpose, when we see such fruit of our ministry — "*we live.*" And it is in this sense that we may understand the word *life* in the text. Religion *is our life.* It is the end for which our life was given us: and in complying with this end, as we answer the real purpose of our being, so we attain to the true enjoyment of it. Religion is our *happiness;* our true and highest happiness. In fact it is so essential to our happiness, that we cannot really be happy without it. Nothing deserves the name of happiness, which is not connected with religion. Without it

we do *not live:* and in this sense, therefore, religion is our life. Even with respect to the present world this statement is most substantially true. Happiness and religion are closely united together; so closely, that religious persons are not merely the happiest people in the world, but the *only happy* persons in it. They alone know and experience what *true* happiness is. This indeed is a statement, which the irreligious part of the world will not admit to be true. They cannot understand it, and therefore will not believe it. Disliking religion, ignorant of its nature, and strangers themselves to the peace and joy which it produces, they deny that those, who live under its influence, can be happy. 'What profit (they ask) can there 'be in serving God? What pleasure in walk-'ing with Him?' But it is a truth notwithstanding: and if they would consult their own reason aright, it would assure them that, even in this world, religion *is our life:* and that persons do not *really live,* in the sense in which we are now using the expression, till, in the language of Scripture, they "*set their hearts to the words of God, and observe to do them.*" Does not reason teach us that all happiness must come from God: and that those whom He makes happy, must be so? And does not the same reason lead us to conclude, that those who fear, obey, and serve

Him, are the persons whom He *will* make happy? What is religion, but to live in communion with God; to walk with Him in his faith and fear; to be at peace with Him, and to expect every thing good from Him? And does not reason tell us, that such a state must be a happy one?—As to Revelation, this expressly states the same thing. There we distinctly read, that "Godliness has the promise of the life that now is"—that they who fear the Lord and trust in Him, and hope in his mercy, *are* happy and blessed. What, indeed, are the dispositions which religion inspires and increases in the soul, but peace, joy, hope, love, meekness, contentment, resignation, those dispositions in the experience of which true happiness is to be found? What are the virtues and duties, the practice of which real religion promotes, but industry, diligence, fidelity, temperance, moderation, charity, in the exercise of which real happiness consists? O, my brethren, whatever may be your thoughts and feelings on this subject, be assured, that you do not think and feel aright, unless in your mind you regard religion and happiness as intimately associated together. Be assured, whatever the world, or the Devil, or your own evil heart may suggest to the contrary, that even in this world religion is your *life;* that so far as your present happiness is concerned, you do

not really *live*, unless you live unto God, and enjoy fellowship with him.

But what then will be the case in the next world? Will you love, will you be happy *there*, unless you are religious here? Let me intreat you to reflect on the infinite importance of that world which is to come. Think on that word *eternity:* an eternal state of being, a never-ending existence. Think of the vast and inconceivable difference of being happy or miserable in that state;- of being happy or miserable *for ever!* We must all be either in a state of happiness or misery in eternity: and what then is that one thing, which will cause this difference? What is that one thing, on which our eternity of happiness or of misery will depend? It is religion, our religion here. It is religion which alone can save us from eternal misery, and can secure to us eternal happiness hereafter. Sin, unpardoned sin, must be followed by suffering and punishment. An unsanctified heart, at variance with God, and at a distance from Him, can be fitted only for misery and torment. It is no use, my brethren, no charity to conceal these things from you; nay, it would be the greatest cruelty, not to tell and remind you most distinctly of them. The Almighty God, who made us, and will judge us, has most solemnly and repeatedly declared, that "the

wicked shall not escape;" that they "shall be turned into Hell;" that "the soul which sinneth, it shall die;" that "death is the wages of sin;" that "the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; that "sinners shall not stand in the judgement:" that "the unrighteous shall go into everlasting punishment." These are the plain and aweful declarations of the Holy Scriptures — of those same Scriptures, which also assure us that if we would avoid the judgements thus denounced on the ungodly, we must now turn to God through faith in his dear Son, with humble and penitent hearts; and in a daily dependence on his grace must walk with Him in newness of life. This is the *only* way by which we can escape the damnation of Hell, and obtain eternal life. And what is this way, my brethren, but religion; —that religion, of which I am speaking;— religion; compounded of faith and practice; of faith, by which our sins are pardoned through the blood of Jesus, and our hearts renewed by His Spirit; of practice, namely, a holy walking with God in the way of His commandments, by which we evidence his work in our hearts, and our meetness for his heavenly kingdom? This is religion; and since it is only by this religion that we can be saved, and admitted into Heaven; in

this sense also religion is our life; pre-eminently our life. As it is only so long as we are really religious, that we *do* live, or know what true happiness is, in this world; so it is only through religion that we can obtain eternal happiness, and can *live for ever*, in the world to come.

Such, my brethren, is the reason, subjoined in confirmation of the statement in the text, that religion "*is not a vain thing for you.*" And O that you did but all feel the full force of this statement, thus supported and confirmed! "Religion is not a vain thing for you; for it is your life."

Think, O think, I beseech you, with how many of you religion may have hitherto been regarded "*as a vain thing:*" for how many years you may have despised and neglected it! Through how large a portion of your life you may have undervalued and abused the means vouchsafed to you of promoting and advancing religion in your own soul! How many sabbaths you may have wasted! How many sermons you may have heard to no purpose! How often you may have been warned, and instructed, and admonished, and intreated in vain! O think, I beseech you, of these things, and say, what is to be the end of them? Call to mind that this religion, to which you may have paid so little attention and regard, is yet *your life.*

It is by it that you must *live*: and that if you at last die destitute of it, you will die for ever.

Perhaps you are flattering yourselves with the hope, that if you do not become religious *now*, you may yet become so *hereafter*; that though at present you may neglect and slight it, yet that at the approach of death, you will know and experience what religion is. Ah! be not deceived. Build not on such a weak and sandy foundation. There is no reason to hope that persons who have habitually neglected religion through their lives, in general become religious before they die: The testimony of your ministers would be decidedly against any presumption of this kind. In their attendance on the beds of the sick and of the dying they too often find, that as men have sown, so they reap; as they have lived, so they die: Sickness and the prospect of death, instead of softening their hearts, render them even still more callous: and the want of spiritual feeling, which has distinguished them in life, becomes even still more apparent on the very borders of eternity. At such a time they often appear to be awefully stupified, and even judicially hardened. How indeed can we expect it to be otherwise? Have men any right to look for miracles? Have they any reason to suppose that God will grant them

at the last that blessing which they have been refusing all their days: that He will give them, when they come to die, that grace to repent of their sins, and to believe on His dear Son, which they have been rejecting throughout their lives? There is no grounds for any supposition of this kind. The Lord himself says, "They that despise me, shall be lightly esteemed."—"They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices." And are we to wonder if He should so do, as He has said he will do? Are we to wonder, if those who neglect religion all their lives, die at last in their sins: if such as have previously despised the means of grace, and have lived a careless, worldly, and ungodly life, should at last expire in a hopeless and impenitent state? Exceptions, indeed, there may occasionally be to the truth of these remarks. And such exceptions, whenever they occur, are to be admired as instances of the abounding grace and mercy of the Lord; who granted in one case repentance to the thief upon the cross; and who may sometimes now pluck a brand out of the burning, even at the eleventh hour of the day. But are men to presume on these solitary or occasional examples, and overlook the great practical lesson to which

our subject necessarily leads? The lesson is this;—seek religion *now*. Make it your aim, your study, your business to become religious *now*, while you have time, and health, and means, and opportunity. "Seek the Lord, while He may be found: call upon Him while He is near." Seek Him in all the ways in which He has commanded you to seek Him. And seek Him, till you have found Him; till He shall have shed abroad His fear, His love, and His peace in your hearts; till you shall be able to say, "I *know whom* I have believed." "*Strive* to enter in at the strait gate." "*Labour* for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life." "Be diligent to make your calling and election sure." Remember "it is not a vain thing for you: because it is your life."

SERMON III.

THE REASONABLENESS OF THE OFFERS AND TERMS OF THE GOSPEL.

ISAIAH, i. 18.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

RELIGION often suffers from two causes, the misrepresentation of its enemies, and the misconduct of some who profess themselves its friends. The former decry it as folly and madness; the latter, by their indiscretions and extravagances, sometimes appear to countenance the charge. But "wisdom is justified of her children." True religion, after all that can be said or done against it, is in itself a most *reasonable* service: all its requirements are founded in reason; all its proposals are agreeable to reason. It addresses itself to the understanding; claims

to be approved in proportion as it is known and understood; courts inquiry; and is not afraid of bringing its pretensions to the test of judgement and experience.

We have a proof of this in the text. The Lord, by His prophet, having severely rebuked the people of Judah for their wickedness and sin, proceeds, notwithstanding, to disclose to them a way and terms of reconciliation; and then calls upon them to consider and decide on the equitable nature of his proposals. "Come now, and let us *reason* together, saith the Lord."

We surely cannot enough admire the grace and mercy of this proceeding. That the Lord should condescend to reason with His rebellious people, and invite them to argue the matter with Him, what long-suffering and loving-kindness did it shew!

It was not, however, to Judah only that He shewed these things. He shews them also to us. The words of the text, though directly addressed to others, belong no less to us. The same offers are made to us; the same terms proposed to us; and we are equally invited to *reason* the matter with Him. He appeals to our understanding, and calls upon us to say whether we can reasonably object to His statements, propositions, and requirements.

This whole chapter is, in fact, but a pro-

mulgation of that Gospel, which is revealed to us throughout the Scriptures; which appeals in the strongest manner to our consciences, our hearts, and our understandings; and in respect to which the Lord is continually saying to us, by His word outwardly, and by His spirit inwardly, "Come now, and let us reason together." It is in this work that He also employs His ministers: and it is this work in which I purpose, in humble dependance on His blessing, to be engaged at this time. I wish in His name to *reason* the matter with you, my brethren: to shew you that religion is a reasonable service; that the offers and terms of the Gospel are such as you cannot reject without doing violence to your own understanding; and against complying with which you can advance no sound and solid objection. — May the Spirit of God guide me in this attempt, and impress your hearts and consciences for His mercy's sake in Jesus Christ!

Let us then consider,

I. The Offers of the Gospel, and

II. The Terms of it.

I. By the Offers of the Gospel I mean the offer of those great blessings which it proposes to bestow on us; all of which, though many and distinct in themselves, are in the text summed up in one great particular,

which may be considered as the root and source of all the others, and as virtually comprising and including them all in itself; namely, the pardon of sin. For where sin is pardoned, there every other blessing of the covenant of grace will necessarily follow; adoption, sanctification; victory over Satan, death, and the grave; eternal life, and everlasting glory. — Observe, then, how this blessing is expressed in the text: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." The Almighty here proposes completely to take away the guilt of sin, and consequently to remit the punishment due to it. There are various kinds and degrees of sin; sins of different colours and complexions, more or less aggravated, more or less strengthened by habit and indulgence. But the offer of pardon extends to all alike. Be they as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow; be they red like crimson, they shall become as wool. So completely shall every stain be done away; every mark and trace of guilt be effaced. With this statement agree those other many expressions on the same subject with which the Scriptures abound: as, when God is said to "cast our sins behind his back;" "to bury them in the depths of the sea;" to "not mention," and even to "remember them no more;" to "blot

out our sins as a cloud, and our transgressions as a thick cloud." So complete is the pardon which the Gospel offers, and which the blood of Christ has purchased for us. For in every statement of this pardon, *the price* at which it has been bought, must never be forgotten. "We have redemption *through His blood*, even the forgiveness of sins:" while the descriptions given of the efficacy of this blood, in taking away our guilt, fully confirm the statements which have been made of the nature and extent of the pardon offered us. We are told, for instance, that "The *blood* of Jesus Christ cleanseth from *all* sin:" that Christ "loved us, and *washed* us from our sins in *his own blood:*" while the great multitude, represented in the vision to St. John, as standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, are expressly said by the angel to "have *washed* their robes, and to have made them *white* in the *blood of the Lamb.*"

Such, then, is the Offer made to us in the Gospel. Such is the blessing proposed to be bestowed on us, — the full pardon of all our sin. And now, my brethren, let us *reason* together on this subject. Let me ask you, is not this an offer singularly suited to our wants and circumstances? Is not this a blessing peculiarly adapted to our need?

We are all sinners. In this respect there is no difference: for sin is the transgression of God's law, which is holy, just, and good: and this law we have all broken. We have transgressed it in thought, word, and deed. Let us only look back into our past lives; let us reflect on our conduct and conversation, on the state and disposition of our heart from the first dawn of our reason through the period, whether longer or shorter, which has since succeeded; and then let us say, whether God has *so* been in our thoughts, that we have loved, feared, and obeyed Him before all things. O, my brethren, if we consult our conscience aright, and listen to its faithful admonitions, we must know full well, that far from having done every thing which we ought to have done; far from having left undone nothing which we ought to have done; we have in truth done nothing *as* we ought to have done it. And in many, very many instances, have positively and habitually acted contrary to the known will and holy commandments of our Creator. In a word, we are all sinners in His sight, and are clearly guilty before Him.

And what are the consequence and effect of sin? By sin we have provoked the wrath of God, who "is a consuming fire." We have entailed on us the penalty of sin, which is eternal death: we have incurred the sen-

tence of the law; "Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire." Nor have we in ourselves any means of averting these consequences. We cannot undo the sins we have committed; we cannot recall them; we cannot plead an excuse for them; we cannot atone for them. No present repentance, no future amendment, can take away the guilt of the transgressions that are past." It lies upon us as a heavy weight, ready to sink us down into Hell. It stands against us in all its crimson and scarlet colours, demanding vengeance against us. Nothing but a free, full, and gracious pardon can avail us. Nothing but a gratuitous remission of sin can suit our case. But how to obtain this pardon we naturally know not: nay, whether any such remission of sin would ever be granted to us, we could not of ourselves even conjecture. In this state, then, of things, under these circumstance, is there any subject in the world which more *reasonably* demands our attention than the one in the text? Could any offer be made to us more desirable in itself, more suited to our case, than *that* here proposed to us; the offer of a free and complete forgiveness? When the Lord addresses us as miserable and guilty sinners, and says to us, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool," has He not grounds for

expecting that we shall listen to his proposals with attention and interest; and if we do not, may He not justly complain of us as the most unreasonable of creatures? Well may He say to us, "Come, let us *reason* together," when the subject which He proposes for discussion, is one in which we are, so deeply concerned, and which relates to a remedy so obviously suited to our circumstances. O, my brethren, if we have the understanding of men, we must surely be sensible, that when God talks to us of pardon, and calls upon us to consider His offer of remission of sins, He deals with us in the most *reasonable* manner, and leaves us without all excuse, if we attend not to His offer.

Let us then next advert

II. To the Terms of the Gospel.

By the *Terms* of the Gospel I understand those things which are required of us, in order to our securing to ourselves a personal interest in the promised blessings; in other words, the steps which we must take for applying to our own individual benefit and comfort the general offer of forgiveness of sins. These things are not expressly mentioned in the text; but the very invitation "to come and reason with the Lord" implies the existence of some such terms: while in fact they may be clearly gathered from this chapter; and are plainly stated in the verse

immediately following the text; when it is said, "If ye be willing, and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land."

The promises of the Jewish covenant were many of them temporal; that is, they related to earthly things and were fulfilled in the acquisition of worldly blessings. But at the same time they were, in general, typical of spiritual things, and often actually included in them spiritual blessings. Thus in this passage, though the expression of "eating the good of the land" might primarily refer to the enjoyment of the earthly Canaan; yet its connection plainly shews that it has also a spiritual meaning, and includes a promise of the heavenly Canaan: the first step to the possession and enjoyment of which is the full pardon of sin offered in the foregoing verse. Consequently to this offer, the words "if ye be willing and obedient," immediately following, may be understood as referring, and as pointing out those implied terms on which the Lord proposes to make the scarlet and crimson sins as white as snow or wool.

These Terms, then, are willingness and obedience: *willingness*, as including a feeling sense of our need of forgiveness, and a readiness to accept it as a free gift, graciously bestowed on us for Jesus Christ's sake: and *obedience*, as comprising a disposition to renounce the practice of sin, and a purpose

of, henceforth walking through grace in newness of life. And what then, in other words, are these terms, but the very terms which we find so generally stated in other parts of Scripture, namely, *faith* and *repentance:* faith in the promised mercies of God through Jesus Christ; and repentance from dead works to serve the living and true God in spirit and in truth? Does any guilty, miserable sinner, in his heart believe, though even with a weak and trembling faith, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has made a full atonement for sin on the cross? Does he desire in his soul to have a personal interest in this atonement for the remission of his own individual sins? Does he reflect with a grieved and contrite heart on his past transgressions; and does he long and purpose to become a new creature in Christ Jesus, and through the aid of the Holy Spirit to serve Him in a new and holy life? Is he thus willing and obedient? Does he thus believe and repent? Let such a one assuredly know, that his sins, though many, are forgiven him; that they are blotted out as a thick cloud; that though they were as scarlet, they are now as white as snow; though they were red like crimson, they are now as wool. The blood of Jesus Christ, received and applied by faith with a penitent and contrite heart, has cleansed him from all

sin. We see, then, what are the *Terms* of the Gospel. And now, my brethren, let us again *reason* together. Let me request you to consider, whether there is any thing in these Terms to which you can reasonably object; or the propriety and suitableness of which are not clear to your own understanding.

First, with respect to *faith.* See how the matter stands. God, out of His great love to your soul, in order to save you from the dreadful consequences of your sins, has Himself provided a satisfaction for them, even the precious blood of His own dear Son, which he permitted to be shed on the cross for this very purpose. And now, having made this provision, He requires you to put your trust in the Saviour, thus provided for you, and to believe His word, that if you *do* thus trust in Him for the pardon of your sins, they shall be pardoned; in the same manner as He assured the Israelites in the wilderness, who were bitten by the fiery serpents, that if they would look in expectation of a cure at the serpent of brass, which He had caused to be lifted up, they should certainly be healed. And now is not this a perfectly *reasonable* requisition? Since God has provided a salvation for you, has He not a right to stipulate the way and the means by which you shall apply to your-

self the benefit of that salvation? And what easier, simpler way could He have devised, and one in itself more reasonable, than that you should do honour to *Him*, by giving credit to His word; and to *His Son*, by looking to Him in faith and hope? Possibly, indeed, the very simplicity of the way may appear to you an objection. But how unreasonable would it be to object to a remedy, because it is simple! Naaman, the Syrian, made this sort of objection to the mode which Elisha, the prophet, prescribed to him for the removal of his leprosy. But how wisely did his servants counsel him, and expose the unreasonableness of his objection. "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?" Apply this reasoning to the case before us. If God should have prescribed to you penances and pilgrimages, fastings and sufferings, as the means of purchasing his favour, you would, probably, have made no objection to *these* terms. Why then should you take offence, and deem the proposal unreasonable, when He merely says to you, "Believe and live." "Look unto me and be saved." "Come unto me, and you shall have rest unto your soul." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ; for through his name, whosoever believeth in

Him shall receive remission of sins." "According to your faith, it shall be done unto you."

Secondly, as to *repentance*. When God graciously offers to us a free and full forgiveness of all our sins, on our believing in His Son Jesus Christ, He at the same time requires us to renounce our sins, to forsake the practice of them, and to deny and mortify those corrupt principles in the heart, from which they spring. He says to us by His Prophet, in the verses preceding the text, "Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." My brethren, is there any thing *unreasonable* in this requisition? When God, at such a price as the blood of His own Son, has shown the evil of sin, His hatred of it, and His desire of delivering us from it; has He not a right to require, that if we would avail ourselves of His mercy, we must part with sin? Can it be considered as a hard condition that we should relinquish those practices which cost the Son of God his life; and which, if He had not died for them, would have cost us our souls? Nay, which, if they be not relinquished, will make His death of no avail to us; and notwithstanding his sacrifice, will,

at last ruin our souls? In vain will the blood of Jesus Christ have been shed for us, if we still cleave to our sins. In vain shall we say, that we believe and hope in Him for the pardon of our transgressions, so long as we are still loving and indulging them. Our practice will at once belie and contradict our profession: and it will be plain, that though we pretend to desire the pardon of our sins, we have never really felt any true sorrow for them, nor any proper fear on account of them. How *reasonable*, then, is the requisition that we should repent and turn to God, while we are embracing His offers of mercy through the blood of Christ!

But, possibly, you may here take up an objection of an opposite nature from the one brought forward on the other point, and may plead the *difficulty* of this requisition. You may say, 'That we have been so long 'accustomed to our sins as not to have it in 'our power to part with them; that sin is so 'woven into our nature, that we know not 'how to separate and exclude it; that our 'corrupt propensities are so strong, and our 'resolutions and efforts against them so 'weak, that it is beyond our ability to subdue 'them.' But let me here remind you, my brethren, in answer to this objection, that the offer of pardon through the blood of

Jesus includes in it a promise also of strength sufficient for this very purpose. With the pardon of sin, it unites also the gift of a new heart; a heart, to hate and forsake sin, and to love and obey God; a heart, on which His holy law is written, and to which it is a delight to walk in His commandments. What then becomes of your objection? Can those terms be hard or unreasonable, when a provision is made, in the very Gospel itself, for overcoming the only real difficulty which lies in the way of our complying with them? In fact, the faith and repentance which are required of us in order to our being made partakers of the benefit, are themselves the gift of God, and the work of His Spirit in our hearts. They are both comprehended in the offer of the Gospel; and we have only to pray for them that we may obtain them. If we feel our need of them; if we desire to possess them; if we are humbly sensible of our own natural inability to obtain them; we are directed to ask them of God in earnest supplication and prayer; and we have His promise, that we shall not thus ask in vain. He will give us faith, and will increase it in us. He will grant us true repentance. He will forgive us all our sins, negligences, and ignorances; and will "endue us with the grace of His Holy Spirit, to amend our lives according to His holy word,"

From this view, then, of the Offer and Terms of the Gospel, come, my brethren, and let us once more *reason* together. If religion be in itself so reasonable a service, how can you act so unreasonably as not to choose and follow it? If the Offer of the Gospel is so suited to your need; if the Terms on which this Offer is made are so just and equitable, why do you not, by complying with the one, accept and secure the other? You may have lived perhaps for many years with little thought and care about your soul: you may have committed a multitude of sins: you may have contracted an intolerable load of guilt; and yet now, after all, you here see that God — the God whom you have offended — freely offers to forgive you every thing, and to blot out your transgressions for His name's sake, on such terms that you cannot reasonably make the slightest objection to them. Surely it must be madness in you to refuse compliance with such an offer; especially when you take into consideration the dreadful consequence of rejecting it; the punishment which awaits unpardoned sin, aggravated by the guilt of having despised the mercy of the Lord. How greatly must sin have blinded your minds and perverted your understanding, if you persist in choosing the ways of death, before those of life and peace! O if this be the case with any of you, may

the Lord open your eyes, and bring you to your senses, and shew you the right and the good path!

But possibly there may be present some poor and fearful sinners; some, who would gladly and thankfully find peace through the Gospel; but whom a sense of guilt deters from taking to themselves the hope and comfort which it gives to others. 'Our sins' (they say) 'are so many, so great, and so aggra-'vated, that we doubt whether there can be 'mercy for them.' But, my brethren, you need not doubt it. You have no reasonable grounds for doubting it. Think of the promise in the text, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Is not this promise sufficient to take away your fears, and to cheer your soul? What can you require more? You have the word of God, that your sins, though of the deepest dye, shall be blotted out.

O be not faithless, but believing! What God hath promised He will perform, for His own sake, for His truth's sake, for His Son's sake. Only believe His word, and you shall find rest and joy to your souls. "Justified by faith, you shall have peace with God, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

SERMON IV.

TRUE RELIGION CONSIDERED AS TO ITS BEGINNING, PRINCIPLE, AND END.

GALATIANS, v. 6.

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love.

THERE have always been in the world, and there still are, many religions; many false religions, and many misrepresentations of true religion; many persons "desiring to be teachers, who understood neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm;" many things inculcated which have no connection with religion; and many things prescribed as essential to it, which, far from being necessary, are in fact matters of indifference.

Amidst this variety and distraction of opinions, of what incalculable value is the Bible! Of what infinite importance to us is it to possess such a standard of truth—a standard, to which we may bring all these fluctuating and contradictory sentiments; by

which we may measure their pretensions, and see how far they are deserving our notice and approbation! In this view, the Bible is indeed "a light unto our feet, and a lamp unto our paths." O, my brethren, let us learn habitually to weigh every thing which professes to be connected with religion in these balances of the sanctuary. Let us bear in mind the admonition of the prophet, "to the law and to the testimony." Let us "not believe every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God," by diligently and faithfully comparing them with His revealed and written will.

As to what true religion really is, there cannot be a clearer or better description of it than what is contained in the short, but comprehensive view given in the text — "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love" — especially when this passage is compared with two other passages of a very similar meaning. The one is taken from the sixth chapter of this same epistle, where the Apostle says, that "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature;" — the other from the seventh chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, where the same Apostle states, that "Circumcision is nothing; and uncircumcision is

nothing: but the keeping of the commandments of God."

In all these three passages there is an express declaration of what religion is not: it is "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision." In those early days of Christianity one of the erroneous sentiments maintained and propagated by many, was, that the Jewish rite of circumcision, as being originally instituted of God, still formed a necessary part of true religion; and that even under the Christian dispensation persons could not be justified without being circumcised. But this statement St. Paul constantly and vigorously opposed, as being one which virtually undermined the Gospel, by admitting something else into the foundation of our Christian hope, beside the merits of Christ Jesus. With respect, however, to circumcision, merely considered by itself, it was a matter of no importance whether those who embraced Christianity had been Jews or Gentiles, circumcised or uncircumcised. They were not the better Christians for having this mark of peculiarity; they were not the worse for being without it. It was altogether a matter of indifference. Real religion did not consist in any thing of this kind: it did not consist in such outward distinctions. So far as it related to a person being a true Christian, "neither circumcision availed any thing, nor

uncircumcision." *What* then *is* true religion? How is it to be described? It is "a new creature." It is "faith working by love." It is "keeping the commandments of God." These, we see, are in fact but three descriptions of the same thing: and all taken together, give a clear and comprehensive view of true religion. It is such a change of heart and mind, as disposes and enables us to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and to live a life of holy devotedness to God. It is "a new creature," a new Creation: for religion is a supernatural work, the work of God in the soul of man. It is "faith working by love:" for a living, operating faith, productive of holiness, is the new principle implanted by God in the heart. It is "keeping the commandments of God:" for the new creation is a creation unto good works; and what is the love, by which faith works, but "the fulfilling of the law?"

Such is the view here given of true Religion.

To this Scriptural statement of it let us habitually apply every thing which takes to itself the name of religion, and by it try its pretensions to that name. In this way we shall detect many falsehoods that assume the appearance of truth; and shall get rid of many human additions to religion which only encumber and disfigure it.

What I intend, in further discoursing on this subject, is separately to consider the different parts of the description here given of true religion, for the purpose of more distinctly shewing you what it is, and thus of enabling you to judge more accurately between the reality and the semblance of it — between what really is true religion, and what only professes to be so.

I. True Religion is a "new creature."

Man has no true religion by nature, nor ever can have any. Water cannot of itself rise to a higher level than the spring from whence it issues; nor can the soul of man, in its natural, carnal state, rise to a spiritual level. Man by nature is blind and ignorant as to the things of God. He knows not God, and whenever he is brought to know something of Him, he dislikes and shuns Him. He loves the world; he loves sin; he can follow idols; he can serve and worship Mammon; he can invent and embrace false religions; he can pervert, and corrupt, and abuse true religion; he can render a formal, outward, ceremonial service: nay, he can come up to something even of a moral obedience: but he can get no higher. He may do all these things: but these things are not religion. Real religion is a *spiritual* service, and must spring from a *spiritual* principle. "But *that* which is born of the flesh, is flesh:" it is "*that* which is

born of the Spirit, that is spirit." And, consequently, before any man can spiritually serve God, he must be born of the Spirit. He must be born from above. "Marvel not" (said our Saviour to Nicodemus), "Marvel not that I said unto you, ye *must* be born again." Spiritual life, or, in other words, the disposition and ability to believe in Jesus Christ, and to fear, love, and serve God (which is true religion), is a gift from above. It is a "new creation;" it is the insertion of a new principle into the heart by a supernatural power. Here true religion begins; hence it proceeds: and by the same divine power it is preserved, advanced, and carried on unto the end. Till this new creation takes place, there may be circumcision or uncircumcision; there may be form and profession; there may be partaking of sacraments, and attendance on ordinances; there may be forms and feelings; there may be knowledge and talking; there may be fasting and penances; there may be decency of conduct; there may be bounty to the poor: but there is no true religion. The heart is not right in the sight of God: for it is not created anew by His Spirit.

Such, my brethren, is one part of the Scriptural view of true religion. To this standard, then, bring every thing which pretends to be religion. Try the doctrine whether it be of

God. Put it to this test, and see if it will stand the proof. For instance, should any one endeavour to persuade you that you are not, by nature, an evil and depraved creature;—that you are not *so very far gone* from original righteousness, but are only turned a little aside from it;—that you have strength in yourself sufficient to amend your own heart, and to turn it to God; that education, example, and instruction are quite competent, with some little portion of divine help, to make you truly religious;—that you have to do little more than heartily resolve and firmly exert yourself, in order to become at any time a real servant and worshipper of God: should any one, I say, attempt to persuade you of these things;—should he give you this view of the nature of true religion, and of your ability for embracing and practising it; give no credit to such representations. See how plainly they are opposed by the whole tenour of Scripture; how little they accord with the standard there exhibited. They agree not with "the law and with the testimony," and therefore they have no truth in them. True religion is not the improvement of the old stock; but the ingrafting of a new one on it. "It is a new creature." Let us now see,

II. What is the new Principle which in this creation is inserted into the soul?

It is *Faith.* Faith is the great moving principle in the heart of the new man; that is, of the truly religious man. It is the principle from which he lives and acts; and which distinguishes him in a peculiar manner from all other persons, for while *they* walk by sight or by sense, *he* walks by faith.

And what then is faith? It is such a cordial believing and trusting in the word of God, because it is *His* word, as produces a suitable conduct. It is *so* receiving the divine testimony, as to be fully persuaded of the truth of what is written in Scripture, and to be governed in our practice by that persuasion. The object of faith is the word of God; whatever He has caused to be revealed, and written for our information; but especially His gracious and precious promises of forgiveness of sins for the sake of Him who is His incarnate Son and our only Saviour; of the gift of the Holy Spirit to be our Guide, Sanctifier, and Comforter; and of eternal life. These promises faith embraces. It regards them as true, relies upon them as sure, and acts accordingly.

Such is the simple nature of Scriptural faith. It is merely a practical dependance on the word of God; it is believing with the heart as true, the word of the God of truth. Can any thing be more reasonable than such a belief? Can any thing in itself appear to

be more easy than crediting such a testimony? Yet, simple, and reasonable, and easy as such an assent and exercise of the mind appears to be, it is nevertheless a work far beyond the natural power of man in his fallen and depraved condition. It is, as we have already observed, the produce of a "new creation." Man, through his natural depravity, is totally indisposed to believe with the heart the word of God; a strong and striking proof of the depth and extent of his depravity. Let us remember, that it was through unbelief that our first parents fell. God had expressly told them, that "in the day in which they eat of the forbidden fruit, they should surely die." Had they simply and firmly believed these words, they would not have broken the divine command: but in opposition to the word of God, the devil directly told Eve, that she "should *not* surely die." To this lie, instead of obeying the truth, she listened. She believed not God, and so fell into the transgression. And from this time unbelief has become the rooted sin of our nature; and so deeply rooted, that nothing but divine grace can eradicate it; and by implanting in us a disposition to believe, can re-produce faith in our hearts. This, then, is the Principle, the principle of faith; which, in the very commencement of true religion in the soul, is produced and generated there by the Spirit of God.

Now let us see the *vast importance* of this principle in true religion. It is of such importance, that not only can there be no true religion without it, but that it is in fact the very life of religion in the soul. It is only by faith that our peace can be made with God. Till with the heart we believe the testimony and promises of God in Jesus Christ, we are not, and we cannot be reconciled unto Him. But when we *do* thus believe, our peace is made. We are united to Christ, and interested in all the benefits of His mediation; the first of which is forgiveness of sins. Our sins are pardoned. There is no condemnation to us. Being justified by *faith*, we have peace with God. He becomes our reconciled Father, and we become His children by adoption and grace; for "we are all the children of God by *faith* in Jesus Christ."

Again, it is by the exercise of the same principle of faith, that true religion is maintained and advanced in the soul. There is not a step which can be effectually taken without it. It is by *faith* that we live; by *faith* that we stand; by *faith* that we walk. According as our faith is weaker or stronger, greater or less, religion is in a more or a less vigorous state in our hearts. *By faith* we are sanctified: for in proportion to the belief with which we embrace the exceeding great and precious promises of Scripture, we are made "partakers of the divine nature." *By faith* we

obtain an answer to our prayers: for "whatsoever ye ask in prayer *believing* ye shall receive:" and "what things soever ye desire, when ye pray, *believe* that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." *By faith* our hearts are purified. *By faith* we overcome the world. If we wish more plainly to see the importance and power of this principle, let us look at the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews. There we shall see, in all the eminent servants of God, how great a principle was faith; how powerfully it wrought in their lives; what conquests over self, sin, and the world it enabled them to achieve; how irreligious and disobedient they would have been if this divine principle had not been actively at work in their hearts.—Such, then, are the Scriptural statements of the nature and efficacy of faith.

Now do any pretenders to religion impugn these statements? Do they teach that faith is not a divine work in the soul; a new principle inserted there by the regenerating grace of God? Do they contend, that a man may *believe*, in the sense in which we have been using the word, through the mere effort of his own understanding? Do they affirm that man is not naturally indisposed to place implicit credit in the word of God, but is of himself both willing and able cordially to receive his testimony? Do they teach that faith is not of that importance in religion, which I

have shewn it to be; that the effects ascribed to it are produced by some other cause, and not by this; that it is not through believing, but by some other means, that our justification is accomplished; our peace made and maintained; our sanctification advanced; our prayers answered; and the world overcome?

Are such things, I ask, asserted and taught as parts of true religion? Bring them to the Scriptural standard. Try them by the test of the written word. You will find them wanting. They are unsound, unscriptural statements; and it is your wisdom and your duty to reject them as such.

Let us now consider true religion,

III. As to its Fruit. What is the *end* which it is designed to produce? It is holiness;—holiness of heart and life;—devotedness to God;—the bringing forth the fruits of righteousness. This is the end to which the beginning necessarily leads: for the new creation is a creation unto holiness. The man, who is created anew, is created unto good works: while that faith, which is by regeneration implanted in the soul, is a holy principle which necessarily produces a holy life and conversation. He who is born again, and lives by faith, cannot but live unto God, and keep His commandments: for faith works by love, and "love is the fulfilling of the law."

What indeed is the great object of true religion, considered with respect to mankind, but to fit and prepare them for heaven? Christianity proposes to recover them from their fallen state; and with this view to reconcile them to God, and to renew their natures, that so they may be made capable of loving Him, and dwelling with Him for ever—of delighting in His service, and doing His will. It is to this great end—the sanctification of their nature, and their meetness for heavenly glory—that the new creation of their hearts, and the implantation of the new principle of faith, are entirely subservient. If it were possible that these operations could fail of accomplishing this end, they would in fact be of no use: they would avail no more than circumcision or uncircumcision. If it were possible that the man, who was created anew in Christ Jesus, and lived by faith in Him, could be still in his heart indisposed to love God, and in his life should not strive to keep his commandments, —such a man would, in fact, be no nearer to true religion than he was in his natural state. —But these things are impossible. They cannot be. To suppose it otherwise, is, and must be, a vain supposition. The faith of the Christian is a holy faith; it is a faith which "worketh by love."

Should any one, then, pretend to teach you that a holy life is not necessary to sal-

vation; that you may be a true Christian, and yet not depart from iniquity; that you may have a saving faith, and yet live without love in your hearts, or its fruits in your lives; you plainly see what reception you must give to such pretensions, if you would treat them as they deserve to be treated. You must reject them as false and unscriptural. You must say, "We have not so learned Christ:" as indeed you will have reason to say, "if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus."

Upon the whole, then, my brethren, you see *what* true religion is, and *how* it may be distinguished from every thing else which bears the name. It is the work of the Spirit of God in the soul of man, disposing him cordially to believe the word of God, especially His promises in Jesus Christ, and inducing him to lead a holy and consistent life. — Are these your views and apprehensions of religion? and (which is a question of far greater moment to you) is this your own religion? It is not the merely knowing what religion is, that will avail you any thing. It is the being yourself religious which alone can profit you. Has religion begun in your heart, as true religion always begins, "by a new creation?" Have you been born again from above, by the Spirit of God? Do you give implicit credit to the

word of God, and simply and cordially rely on his promised mercies in Jesus Christ? Is this your faith a holy and productive principle in your heart; and do you bring forth the fruits of it in your daily walk and conversation? Bear in mind, that true, Scriptural religion changes and influences the whole man. It is walking by faith, and that a faith which worketh by love. O that such religion were more prevalent among us—that we could see many thus walking on every side, and bringing forth such fruits! Let us pray that God in His great mercy would be pleased to pour out His Holy Spirit upon us, and to water us abundantly with His heavenly grace: that He would keep us from error, and lead us into all needful and salutary truth: that He would greatly increase and multiply around us the number of true converts to His holy faith: and that He would guide and strengthen his believing people in the ways of godliness; would fill them with all peace and joy in believing; and would enable them to abound more and more in love, in good works, and in all the fruits of righteousness, to His praise and glory, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON V.

PREVALENCE OF UNBELIEF.

ISAIAH, liii. 1.

Who hath believed our report?

SINCE the fall of our first parents there never has been but one true religion in the world. Mankind were then placed under a dispensation of mercy; and though the dispensation has varied as to the measure of light with which it has been accompanied, yet the truths revealed have always been in substance the same. The Gospel, or, in other words, the proclamation of mercy to fallen man, was first announced to Adam in those memorable words, "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." And every subsequent revelation of the divine will, in respect to the salvation of man, has been only an enlargement of this original promise. To the Apostles, indeed, was reserved the important office of preaching the Gospel in its fullest and clearest light: but still the

prophet Isaiah, many hundred years before, had proclaimed the same truths, and had given the same view of them, with that which the Apostles themselves afterwards gave. He calls it in the text "a *report;*" and does not St. Paul speak of it as a "*saying*" — "a faithful saying, which was worthy of all acceptation?" Again, the Prophet intimates the unbelief of those to whom the Gospel was preached; and does not St. Paul say, that "not many wise, not many noble, not many learned are called?" And does not St. John state, that "Christ was in the world, and the world knew Him not" — that "He came unto His own, and His own received him not?"

I purpose, in discoursing on these words of the Prophet, to consider,

I. The *Character* which he here gives of the Gospel: and,

II. The *Question* which he asks in reference to it.

And may the Spirit of God so mix the word with faith in our hearts, that we may believe this report to the saving of our souls!

I. The Character here given of the Gospel is that of a *report.* Let us see,

First, in what respects it resembles a report. — A report is the statement of things or facts done or occurring at some distance of time or place; of events which we our-

selves have not witnessed; of things which we ourselves have not seen, but of which an account has been brought to us by others, and to which our belief is demanded in proportion to the degree of credibility which attaches to those who bring us the account.

And such, then, is the Gospel. In these respects it agrees with the general character of a report. It contains a statement of events and facts which we ourselves have not seen, but which we are required to believe on the authority of others. It professes to disclose to us the knowledge of many unseen things, and future events; and requires us to give credit to their existence and certainty, on the testimony furnished in confirmation of them. What, in fact, is the history of all past ages but a report—a statement of transactions, at which we were not present—but which we are required to receive as true in proportion to the greater or the less degree of credit which we give to the persons who relate them? What is the account of things which take place in our own days in foreign countries, or even in a distant part of our own country, but a report; an account, which we receive on the authority of others; and believe, if we believe it at all, on their testimony?

So far, then, in this view, the Gospel may be justly termed a *report*. Let us now see,

Secondly, in what respects this report,

differs from all other reports. Though it be a report, yet it is such a report as was never equalled; such a report as differs indeed from every other which has ever reached the ears of man. This difference may be traced in the *importance* of the truths which it professes to communicate, no less than in the *evidence* by which it is confirmed.

Consider how *important* are the truths which the Gospel reveals to us; *important* both in themselves and to us. The Gospel discloses to us the knowledge of God and the way of salvation. It teaches *who* that great and glorious Being is, on whom our life and happiness, in time and in eternity, depend; and *how* we may approach Him with favour and acceptance, and in a well-grounded hope of everlasting joy and glory. It discloses to us sinners a way of salvation; a redemption from the bondage and condemnation of sin. It tells us, that "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It tells us that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners;" to "give His own life as a ransom for them;" to "make reconciliation for iniquity;" to "bring in an everlasting righteousness;" to "open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers." These are the glorious tidings which the Gospel brings to us:

this is the report, which it makes to us, that "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." My brethren, are not these tidings of great joy indeed? Is not this a report surpassing every other in importance and interest? Is it not one, in which we are all deeply, all personally concerned? Is there any other report which, either in the magnitude of the truths which it discloses, or in the relation which they bear to us, can be compared to this report?

Consider, then, further, the *evidence* by which this report is confirmed. Surely no other report, which ever reached our ears, comes to us so authenticated, so confirmed as this. It has in its favour the testimony of friends and of enemies, of Jews and of Gentiles. When the first preachers of the Gospel proclaimed their glorious tidings, they proved the truth of their statements by many miraculous works and signs. Their writings also abound with many predictions which have been since fulfilled, or are at this time fulfilling in the world; and which therefore in the strongest manner confirm the truths which they revealed and taught. But indeed we have other and still more conclusive testimony on the subject. We have or may have the testimony of our own senses to the truth of this report. The Gospel claims to

be the power of God unto salvation. It proposes, where it is received and obeyed, not only to ensure the possession of an eternal inheritance in heaven, but even on earth to work a great and glorious change in the hearts of men; to deliver them from the power and practice of sin; to create in them spiritual desires and affections; and to make all things new within them. In short, it proposes to effect so great a moral change in the soul, as in the figurative language of Scripture is expressed by the changing of a lion into a lamb, or a barren wilderness into a fruitful field. And is not this effect produced, is not this change wrought, by the preaching of the Gospel? Surely we must wilfully shut our eyes, if we do not see some testimonies of this kind even in our own days to the truth and power of the Gospel. St. Paul in his epistle to the Corinthians, having recited a list of very grievous kinds of sinners, immediately adds, "and *such* were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Such was the change which the preaching of the Gospel had wrought in some of these Corinthians: and surely the working of such a change was a decided proof of the truth of that report, by which the change had been wrought. But do we see nothing of these things in our own

days? Do we see no persons, whose hearts and lives have been made new by the power of the Gospel; who, in consequence of receiving this report, are become new creatures, professing very different hopes, and leading very different lives from what they formerly did? Do we see no persons of whom we may say, 'They were drunkards, or 'swearers, or covetous, or worldly, or impure, 'or profane—but they are now washed, and 'sanctified, and justified in the name of our 'Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God: 'they were once the servants of sin, and their 'members the instruments of unrighteous-'ness; but now, since the time in which they 'attended to the report of the Gospel, they 'are become the servants of God, and their 'members instruments of righteousness unto 'Him?' I ask, do we see no instances of this kind—no examples of such a work and operation on the heart? We may surely see such, if we are disposed to look after them, and to admit them when discovered. And let us then remember, that every such instance, every example of such a moral change and conversion in the soul, is a testimony to the truth of the Gospel; a convincing evidence that it is indeed "the power of God unto salvation." From this view of the *Character* here given of the Gospel, let us now consider,

II. The *Question* which the prophet asks in reference to it, "Who hath believed our

report?" This question is evidently the language of complaint, of surprise, and of grief. It implies, that few believe the report. Important as it is with respect both to the truths which it proclaims, and to the persons to whom it proclaims them; confirmed and established as it is by the most conclusive, the most convincing evidence: yet it is intimated, that not many of those who hear this report, give attention or credit to it. "Who," asks the prophet, with a mixture of sorrow and indignation, "Who hath believed our report?"

And has there not been always occasion for such language as this? Have not the ministers and preachers of the Gospel had too much reason, at all times, to lament and complain, that so few of those who hear the report of the Gospel, believe it? Is not there ground for asking the same question at present? May *we* not say with the prophet, "Who has believed our report?"

Perhaps you question the propriety of this application. You do not think it just. You are of opinion, that, whatever might have been the fact in the days of the prophet, or in those of the first preachers of the Gospel, yet that *now* the case is otherwise. *Now* a large portion of the nations are become professedly Christian. In our own country, at least, Christianity is the

established religion; and all its inhabitants avow themselves to be Christians. Here, then, you may think that the observation cannot apply. Here, where all are baptized, and call themselves after the name of Christ, it surely cannot be intimated that *few* believe the report.

But, my brethren, in reply to these remarks, let me request you more attentively to consider our meaning when we speak of *believing* this report. To believe it, is not merely to *assent* to the truth of it; not merely to give a sort of credit to the facts which it relates, and to the doctrines which it professes to teach. To believe it, in the sense here intended, is much more than such an assent. It implies a cordial compliance with the truths revealed; a receiving of them into the heart, so as to influence and control the conduct. The very nature of the report shews that such is the belief intended and required. For let us bear in mind the importance of the things which it discloses: let us consider our personal interest in them. They are not things in which we have no concern: they are not things to which we can really give credit, and yet remain uninfluenced by them. They are things which deeply affect our present and eternal happiness; and which, consequently, we cannot truly believe, without

being impelled to a suitable and corresponding practice. They are things on which consequences so momentous depend, that it is impossible but that a hearty persuasion of their being true, must lead men to act accordingly. If men do not *so*, act, the inference is plain and just, that they do not really believe the report; that they have no hearty persuasion of its truth. Take as an illustration of this subject the example of the Egyptians, when Moses forewarned them of the approaching plague of hail. "Behold (says he) to-morrow, about this time, I will cause it to rain a grievous hail. Send therefore now, and gather thy cattle, and all that thou hast in the field; for upon every man and beast which shall be found in the field, and shall not be brought home, the hail shall come down upon them, and they shall die." This was his report: and how did the Egyptians receive it? Some believed, and some believed it not. This is plain from their conduct. For "he that feared the word of the Lord," that is, believed it, "among the servants of Pharaoh, made his servants and his cattle flee into the houses: and he that regarded not the word of the Lord," that is, who believed it not, "left his servants and his cattle in the field." Here you see the difference between belief and unbelief. You would surely say, that those who were not

influenced in their conduct by the report, did not really believe it.—Suppose that a man was informed of a design to rob his house. He is told that at such an hour it would be attacked, and his goods would be plundered. If he believed the intelligence, how would he act? He would doubtless be on his guard at the time mentioned. He would prepare for the attack, and see that he was not taken by surprise. If, after having received the information, he omitted to provide against the danger, it would be plain that he did not believe the report.

Suppose you had been told that such a part of a road, on which you were travelling, was infested by robbers; if you believed the account, how would you act? You either would not venture at all along the dangerous path; or else you would provide yourself with some probable means of defence and protection. If after being admonished you should omit to take these precautions, it would be obvious, that you gave no credit to the report which you had heard; that you did not believe the account of the robbers, or of the dangers of the road.

Apply, then, this test to the subject before us. Try by the same way of reasoning the justice of the language in the text, and of the interpretation which we have put on it. "Who believeth *our* report?" Who *so* be-

lieves it as to be governed and influenced by it? Who *so* believes it, as to act consistently with it? Before you reply to these questions, call again to mind the nature and object of this report. Remember, that it is a report of full unmerited mercy to sinners; of a salvation from sin, purchased for them by the blood of the Son of God; of the gift of the Holy Spirit to convert, sanctify, and govern their hearts. Remember that none can believe this report, who do not receive it into their hearts, and act conformably to it in their lives. And now, bearing these things in your mind, try to give an answer to the *Question* before us, "*Who* hath believed our report?"

Do those persons believe it, who are living in an allowed state of sin; who are knowingly and habitually practising any thing which the law of God forbids them to do? Do those, for instance, who take God's name in vain; who profane his sabbaths; who drink to excess; who lye, or cheat, or steal, or live in any respect an immoral and an ungodly life — do those believe our report? Surely they do not. Whatever they may pretend, they are practically unbelievers. God ranks them among those who believe not, and will at last exclude them from his kingdom and glory. "For they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

Again, do those believe our report, who account *themselves* righteous; who are puffed up with notions of their own goodness, and think to justify themselves before God? No, most assuredly. For this report, if duly received, would teach them to humble themselves before God, to renounce their own righteousness, and to cast themselves exclusively on the mercies and merits of Jesus Christ the crucified. My brethren, judge for yourselves in this matter. The report says, "All have sinned and are come short of the glory of God." "There is none righteous; no not one." "By *grace* ye are saved through faith, and that not of *yourselves;* it is the gift of God." Do those, then, believe this report, who talk of their own goodness, and trust to their own doings, and think by their own works to recommend themselves unto God? Whatever their professions may be, they virtually reject Christ, and so will be rejected of Him. They do not believe our report.

Further, do those believe it, who, calling themselves Christians, are yet habitually self-indulgent in their habits; or worldly in their dispositions and desires; or passionate in their tempers; or uncharitable in their conduct or language; or hard-hearted to the poor; or slothful in their business; or insolent in their behaviour; or resisting lawful authorities; or neglecting the duties of their station; or dis-

contented with their lot, and finding fault with the dealings of Providence? I ask, do any of these persons believe the report of the Gospel? No: for if they did, they would in all these respects be different. "By their *fruits* ye shall know them." The Gospel, if received into the heart, like leaven into the meal, would give its own peculiar flavour to the whole mass. It would make these persons new creatures. Renewed by its influence, they would put off all these works and lusts of the flesh; and they would put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Till such a change, in some measure at least, be wrought in them, they may call themselves Christians, and hope to share the glories of heaven; but God esteems them only as hypocrites and unbelievers, and will assign to them their portion in outer darkness.

And now, brethren, let me request you to cast your eyes around on any neighbourhood, on any parish, on any congregation; and to reflect with yourselves how many persons, alas! there are, who come under some one of these descriptions which I have specified. Take out from among them the openly irreligious and profane, the self-righteous and proud, the false and hypocritical professors of religion, — and what are the numbers which remain? Are they not few, — few in com-

parison with those whom you will have thus taken away? Will you not find but few holy, humble, spiritual Christians, living daily by faith in Jesus Christ, and bringing forth continually and habitually the fruits of his Spirit? Recollect that *these* only are the persons who truly believe the report, and that all others in fact at present receive it not. And let us again remark, how few are they!

Call not this an uncharitable inference; rather say whether it be not a *scriptural* conclusion. Real charity to people consists not in deceiving them with false hopes, but in telling them the truth; not in suffering them to buoy themselves up with a presumptuous confidence, but in shewing them their real danger. Call to mind the declaration of Christ himself in reference to our present subject. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and *few* there be that find it." Was Christ uncharitable, because He made this declaration? You will not dare to say so. He spake the words of truth from love to the souls of men; and He hath said, that those who find the way of life are *few*. I have brought you by a plain course of reasoning to the same conclusion. I have endeavoured to make you judges in the case, and to convince you by the clearest testimony, that few believe our report. Resist not, then, a conclusion so

clearly proved, so powerfully urged. Rather make a practical use of it, and turn it to your own advantage. Are there few that be saved? Then *strive* yourselves to enter in at the strait gate. Instead of cavilling at this statement of a fact, make it a reason with yourselves for more vigorous and earnest endeavours after your own salvation. Are there few who believe our report? Examine diligently with yourselves, whether you are among those few, and labour to make your own calling and election sure. Remember that your unbelief cannot alter the nature, or lessen the importance of the report. The Gospel, whether you believe it or not, is still the power of God unto salvation. The report, whether you give credit to it or not, is still true — is still "a faithful saying." The only difference is this; that if you reject it, while it saves *others*, it will not save *you;* while it proves to *them* the power of God unto salvation, it will not prove so to *you*. Those glad tidings, which refresh and cheer the hearts of others, will, through your unbelief, be no tidings of joy to you. O my brethren, how *can* ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation? How can ye be saved, if ye believe not the record which God has given of His Son? O pray for faith! Pray for a heart to believe our report, that ye perish not in unbelief! You believe numberless reports on

evidence far less conclusive than that on which *this* report is founded; and yet none are of a thousandth part of the importance of which this is to you: for if you shut your ears and close your heart against *this report*, you perish for ever, and without remedy. Lay deeply to heart this most momentous and most consolatory truth, that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners." Be convinced that as this is a "faithful saying," so it is one "worthy of *all* acceptation;" worthy of *your* acceptation: for you are sinners, and cannot be saved, unless He, who came to save sinners, be *your* Saviour. May He impress these things upon your soul! May He reveal Himself to your hearts in all his fulness, preciousness, and love; that you may now believe on Him to the saving of your soul; and may hereafter rejoice in his glorious presence and happiness for ever and ever!

SERMON VI.

THE SIN AND DANGER OF ABUSING RELIGIOUS PRIVILEGES.

MATTHEW, xi. 20, 21, 22, 23, 24.

Then began He to upbraid the cities, wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not. Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee.

COMPASSION and gentleness were two most prominent features in our Saviour's character. It was compassion for the souls of men that

brought Him down from Heaven, and led Him from the manger to the cross: while gentleness pervaded His whole ministry, and in general distinguished all that He said and did. How tenderly did He bear with the dulness of His disciples! How mildly did He expostulate with His bitterest enemies! How gentle and kind were His invitations to sinners! "A bruised reed would He not break; and smoking flax would He not quench." His language was, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."—"Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee: go in peace."—"Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." But it is worthy also of remark, on the other hand, that there are no reproofs to be met with in Scripture more pointed, no animadversions against impenitent sinners more severe, no denunciations of vengeance more tremendous, than those which proceeded out of the lips of our divine Redeemer; a circumstance which shews, by the way, that the tenderest compassion for sinners may be perfectly consistent with the most aweful threatenings against them; and that the minister of Christ, while he is solemnly warning and severely reproving the wilful and habitual transgressor, may at the same time be deeply touched with commiseration for him, and may anxiously desire his happiness. My brethren,

I beg you to notice and remember this remark; and not to conclude that we wish for your destruction, because we may be compelled to denounce it. No: it is with reluctance that we proclaim at any time the terrors of the Lord. We would much rather encourage and console, than threaten and alarm our hearers. But our duty to God and to them requires us to be faithful; and will no more allow us to give peace where the Lord has not given peace, than to make the hearts of the righteous sad, whom He hath not made sad.

Among the instances in which our Lord displays the severity of his aweful reproof is the one related in the text: in which He is said to upbraid the cities, in which His mighty works had been done, because they repented not. He *upbraided* them; a term descriptive of His great displeasure and indignation against them, as well as indicative of their enormous wickedness and guilt: for wicked and guilty to a great extreme must those persons have undoubtedly been, whom the meek and gentle Saviour addressed in a manner so unusual with himself, in language of upbraiding and rebuke.

Let us more attentively consider the particulars of which His statement is composed.

The cities, to which He addresses himself, were Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum,

three cities of Galilee in the northern parts of Judea; on the two first of which He denounces a solemn woe. "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida!" and then, in explanation of the woe thus denounced, He proceeds to compare the guilty state of their inhabitants with that of the ancient cities of Tyre and Sidon, which had formerly flourished at no very remote distance from the place where these now stood. Tyre and Sidon had been large and populous cities, distinguished for their wealth, commerce, and luxury; but, on account of their wickedness and idolatry, had been set forth as examples of divine vengeance. Their destruction, which had been repeatedly predicted by the prophets of Judah and Israel, had been accomplished some few centuries before our Saviour came into the world, first by the sword of Nebuchadnezzar, and afterwards by that of Alexander the Great: and so complete had been the demolition of these once flourishing cities, and so exemplary the judgements of God inflicted on them, that there were scarcely any remains of them at that time to be found. Yet, wicked as had been the inhabitants of these devoted places, our Lord declares in the text that the inhabitants of the cities, to which he addressed himself, far surpassed them in wickedness; and that

it would be more tolerable in the day of judgement, when God shall render to every man according to his works, for the idolatrous and licentious people of Tyre and Sidon, than for the inhabitants of Chorazin and Bethsaida. "It would be *more tolerable;*" a less heavy sentence would be pronounced, a less severe punishment would be executed upon them. And, then, as to Capernaum: this city, says our Lord, "shall be brought down to hell;" and, as if this denunciation were not sufficiently strong to mark His reprobation of the place, He goes on to state, that it exceeded in guilt even the notorious Sodom; that the abominations of this well-known city, which had brought down on it even fire out of heaven, were less offensive to God than was the sin and wickedness of Capernaum. The men of Sodom, indeed, had been "sinners before the Lord exceedingly," and had been set forth "as an example unto those that after should live ungodly." But the men of Capernaum so far exceeded them in guilt, that in the day of final retribution they would incur a more tremendous judgement. And let us bear in mind, my brethren, the Person, by whom this aweful statement was made. It was made by Him, who will himself decide on the respective guilt of every individual; of whom "we believe that He will come to be our

judge;" and from whose lips the final sentence will at last proceed. This consideration adds prodigious weight to the denunciation in the text; and greatly increases our anxiety to know in what particular the transcendant sin of these denounced cities consisted. It consisted, as our Lord informs us, in their neglect and abuse of the superior religious advantages vouchsafed to them. Notwithstanding the mighty works which had been done among them, notwithstanding the distinguishing privileges with which they had been favoured, they still continued impenitent and unbelieving, and consequently far off from God. Observe what these works and privileges had been. The Gospel had been preached among them, and confirmed by many signs and miracles. The Son of God himself had proclaimed to them the glad tidings of salvation; had instructed them in the great truths of religion; and, in proof both of His power and mercy, had performed many wonderful cures, healing divers diseases, rebuking the fevers, and casting out devils in their sight. Thus, Capernaum had been, as it were, "exalted to heaven." It had been eminently favoured with such distinguished mercies and means of instruction, that heaven itself might be said to have been opened to it; its glories revealed, and placed within its reach. — But what had been the

result? The inhabitants of these cities had not valued their privileges, nor profited by them. The design of these mercies was to bring them off from the love and practice of sin, to the love and practice of holiness; to turn them from darkness to light; from the power of Satan unto God. But this design had not been accomplished. They still continued impenitent. They were not guilty, it is true, of the same idolatry which Tyre had practised, nor of the same abominations of which Sodom had been guilty; but still they served sin, they obeyed the devil, the world, and the flesh; they did not repent, embrace the Gospel, and truly turn to God. They heard the words of Christ, they saw His miracles, but they regarded them not: they did not so regard them, as to be savingly influenced by them. Sin still reigned in their hearts; and through the love and power of it they rejected the Saviour, and shut their ears, their eyes, and their hearts against Him. And in doing this our Lord declares that they did worse than either Tyre or Sodom had done. They had resisted greater light, had sinned against greater knowledge, and had incurred a greater guilt. Whether the particular sinful practices in which they might be living, were in themselves as heinous as those in which the inhabitants of Tyre and Sodom had lived, was

not the point. Their means of instruction and grace were far superior; and therefore a sin, in itself less heinous, would in *them* be one of a far deeper dye, and incur a far heavier punishment: because it betrayed *in their circumstances* a far greater obduracy of heart, and a far more incorrigible state of mind. Indeed, our Saviour, to whom all hearts were open, and who knew what was in man, expressly declared that if the same means and mercies had been granted to Tyre and Sodom, which had been vouchsafed to these cities of Galilee, the inhabitants would have repented of their sins; Tyre would have been spared, and Sodom would have been still standing. Here, then, was the ground of the woe denounced in the text. Here was the cause of that severe and awful rebuke which our Saviour uttered in this passage.

From the text, thus explained and opened, I would infer the following important truth, for our discussion and application in the remaining part of this discourse; namely, That a wilful and contemptuous abuse of religious privileges, and of the means of grace and salvation, is a sin of the deepest dye, and will bring down on those who are guilty of it the heaviest condemnation.

On all subjects connected with true, spiritual religion, man, in his natural state, is totally ignorant. He "cannot know them,

for they are spiritually discerned." And on no point is this ignorance more manifest than in respect to sin, its nature, evil, and malignity. It is only from the Bible that we can learn these things. There we are taught what sin is, and in what the evil of it consists. There we are taught, that while sin is the transgression of God's Law, the malignity of it consists in the enmity of the heart to the will of God; and consequently that the aggravation of it will be in proportion to the degree of clearness with which that will is revealed. Hence that statement of Samuel to Saul, that "rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry." Now the Gospel is the fullest and clearest revelation of God's will to man, which He has ever made. It discloses to us the character and counsels of God; His glorious perfections, and gracious purposes towards mankind. In the Gospel, God displays His love and mercy no less than His justice and holiness; and in setting before us the appointed way of salvation, and in commanding us to embrace and follow it, He has manifested the exceeding riches of His grace and favour to us; and has testified in a manner, which carries with it the strongest conviction, that He does not wish the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn and be saved. In proportion, then, to

the degree of light in which these things are revealed, must be the guilt of refusing to see them. In proportion as God vouchsafes to us the means and opportunities of knowing these things, and of working out our salvation, in the way appointed for us, the deeper and more aggravated must be our sin in neglecting or abusing them.

It is, in the first place, a great contempt and affront cast upon God. In this light He esteems the conduct of those who will not attend to and obey His Gospel. He accounts them as despising and contemning Him in their hearts. He calls them, but they will not hear. He invites them, but they will not come. He places all His goodness before them, but they will not see. He offers them a full and free forgiveness of all their many and great offences committed against Him; but they will not accept it. He declares His readiness to receive them into His own immediate service, and to make them happy with Himself both here and for ever; but they reject His proposals. They prefer their trade, or their merchandize, their sins, or their lusts, to His favour and to communion with Him. They choose rather to gratify their own proud, or sensual, or worldly dispositions, than to seek and serve Him, in whose presence is the fulness of joy. And what is all this, but to

despise God; to pour contempt upon His mercy; to dishonour Him in His very gifts, nay, in the richest of all His gifts, — the gift of His dear Son; to say in the heart, even while they profess to serve Him, 'We will 'not submit to His righteousness. We will 'not obey His Gospel. We will not accede 'to His terms of reconciliation. We do not 'desire to live in fellowship with Him.' — And yet let us remember, that in order to commit this sin, we need not be guilty of the idolatries of Tyre, or of the abominations of Sodom. Yea, in the estimation of the world, we may even be moral, decent, honest, good sort of people: while at the same time in our hearts we may be hating the light, and affronting God to His face; and therefore, in this respect, greater sinners in His sight than were the men of Tyre and Sidon, or even of Sodom itself.

In the second place, the sin of which we are speaking is peculiarly aggravated, insomuch as it shews a more determined hardness and obduracy of heart. The stronger is the light, the greater must be the wilfulness of those who refuse to see. The more urgent are the persuasions, the more obstinate must be the mind of those who resist them. What was the circumstance, that made the sin of Israel and Judah so much more aggravated than that of the heathen nations

around them, but the superior light and greater religious privileges which they enjoyed? Idolatry in a *heathen* was acting contrary to the light of reason; it was shutting the eyes against those proofs of the eternal power and godhead of the Creator, which the works of creation and providence furnished. But idolatry in an *Israelite or a Jew* was acting contrary to the light of *revelation;* it was shutting the eyes against those representations which God had especially given of Himself, and according to which He had commanded His worshippers exclusively to regard and honour Him. For a Jew therefore to have set up an Idol and to have worshipped it as God, would have shewn a far more obdurate and consequently a far more wicked state of mind, than if a heathen had done it. Before the Jew could have arrived at such a pitch of wickedness, he must have resisted more light and must have hardened his heart more determinately against the known will of God. What made the sin of Chorazin and Capernaum greater than that of Tyre and Sodom, but the superior advantages which the former possessed over the latter? The inhabitants of Tyre and Sodom had not the Gospel preached to them. They heard not the words of Christ: they saw not His miracles. But it was otherwise with the people of

Chorazin and Capernaum. The Gospel was preached to them. They had the word and ordinances of God among them. Still they repented not. And what is the inference, but that their hearts were in a more hardened state — more wedded to their sins, and riper for judgement?

And now, my brethren, let us apply these things to ourselves. Let us consider how great are the privileges, the religious privileges, and means of grace, which we enjoy in this our favoured land! God hath given to us His Sabbath; a day of sacred rest; a day in which we are especially instructed to attend to the care of our souls, and to cultivate His favour and communion with Him. And what an immense privilege is this! a privilege, which Tyre and Sidon, which Sodom and Gomorrah, never knew: a privilege which no heathen country ever enjoyed. We have also the Word of God; that Word, which is able to make us wise unto salvation. We have this Word read and preached in our churches; distributed throughout the country; placed in our houses and our hands. We have appointed places and regular hours for the public worship of God. We have the ministers and teachers of religion, whose office and employment it is to shew unto men the way of salvation. We have all the advantage which can be

derived from the diffusion on every side of religious publications, of religious societies, of religious education, of religious examples. Such are our privileges;—privileges, to many of which even Bethsaida and Chorazin, even Capernaum itself, though exalted unto heaven, were strangers. And what is the result? What are the consequences? Are these privileges in general duly esteemed? Do we adequately profit by the advantages conferred on us? Do we comply with the purposes—do we answer the ends for which they are bestowed upon us? Alas, my brethren, on how many cities, towns, and villages in this our singularly favoured land, might the Saviour of sinners pronounce the same solemn and aweful sentence denounced in the text! To how many might He say, woe unto *thee!* and woe unto *thee!* and woe unto *thee!* because of their neglect and abuse of the manifold and signal mercies conferred on them! How many of them might He *upbraid* for their unbelief and hardness of heart; when, notwithstanding the mighty works which He has done for them, they yet repent not of their sin and wickedness; but are at this day living in little better than heathen darkness and heathen practices! To how many of them might He justly say, 'If the privileges which are granted to you 'had been granted to heathen Africa, and to

'idolatrous Asia, they would long ago have 'repented in dust and ashes!' Surely it will be more tolerable in the day of judgement for heathens and idolaters, than for the inhabitants of those wicked places who thus despise the mercies of the Lord; who, in the midst of the blaze of light under which they live, prefer the ways and works of darkness; and who, boasting of the name of Christians, exhibit no marks of real Christianity, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. — Surely such cities, towns, and villages, may read in the aweful doom of Tyre and Sidon, of Sodom and Gomorrah, the dreadful punishment which awaits themselves in that day of righteous retribution; when God will render to every man according to his works; when they, who knew their Master's will, and did it not, will be beaten with many stripes; and the slothful and wicked servants, who buried their talents in the earth, will be cast into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But, leaving this general application of the subject, let us make it a little more particular. Religion, my friends, is a *personal* thing. It concerns all *personally*. No one will be saved through another's religion, nor perish through another's want of it. No: the point for our consideration is this: — What is *our own* religious state? And in this view the

subject before us suggests a very solemn inquiry, which I would urge you every one to address to your own heart, and ask, 'Am 'I a despiser of God? Am I one whom 'He so esteems, and will deal with as such? 'Am I one of those whom he accounts worse 'than the wicked inhabitants of Tyre, and 'even Sodom; and whom He will therefore 'punish with a less tolerable punishment?' You must allow this to be an important inquiry: and in replying to it, may you be honest to yourselves! You need not to be reminded of the religious blessings and privileges which God has bestowed upon you, and of the abundant means and opportunities which, as living in this Protestant country, you enjoy of knowing His will, and of becoming wise unto salvation. But it may be well to remind you of the *design* with which God has thus favoured you, and of the *return* which He expects from you. In proportion as He has blessed you with the means of grace and salvation, He expects and requires that you should be profited. In proportion as He hath furnished you with the means of knowing what Christianity is, He expects and requires that you should be Christians — Christians, not merely in name, and form, and profession; but in reality, in truth, and in spirit. True Christians are the light of the world, the salt of the earth, cities set on

a hill which cannot be hid; holy and exemplary in their lives and conversation; not conformed to this world; not walking in the broad road of destruction — but a separate and peculiar people; influenced by the love of Christ as their motive; governed by the Word of God as their rule; living to His glory as their end; denying themselves, taking up their cross, and crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts. Such are true Christians; and such a Christian does God expect you individually to be, with all the means and opportunities which He has given you of being so. Now the question is, are you such a Christian, or are you not? Are you seeking and endeavouring to become such a Christian, or are you only neglecting and abusing the religious privileges which you enjoy? O my brethren, if with all the advantages which you possess, you are no better than those who possess them not; if you are still found profaning the blessed Sabbath, and applying it to purposes to which it was not intended to be applied; if you are still negligent in attending the house and ordinances of God, and slighting the means of grace and instruction; if you still dishonour the Word of God, not meditating on its sacred contents, not praying to have them mixed with faith in your hearts; if you are still careless in your lives, sensual in

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your mind and conduct, covetous and worldly in your pursuits, following your worldly callings with the same ungodly eagerness with those who know not God; doing as others do, and merely walking after the course of this world; if neither the promises nor threatenings of the Gospel, neither the mercies nor the terrors of the Lord can prevail with you to break off from your sins, and to lead a godly, righteous, and sober life, perfecting holiness in the fear of God — O, if this be the case with you, how can you hope to escape the woe denounced on Chorazin and Bethsaida? How can you hope that it will be more tolerable for you in the day of judgement than it will be for the inhabitants of the favoured but wicked Capernaum? I beseech you to take this question into deep and serious consideration; and, if need be, to awake from the aweful slumber in which you are sunk. He who will come to be your Judge, has plainly told you in the text what judgement you may expect at His hands. He knows and correctly estimates the value of all your privileges; and He will call you to a strict account for them all. "O that you may be wise, — that you may understand this, — that you may consider your latter end!" "God is not mocked: what a man sows, that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption.

But he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting." May God give you grace to sow to the spirit now, that in that day when He shall gather His wheat into the garner, you may joy with the joy of the harvest!

SERMON VII.

FALSE AND TRUE GROUNDS OF GLORYING.

JEREMIAH, ix. 22, 24.

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.

THE prophet had been endeavouring to excite in the minds of the Jewish people a holy fear of God; and to this end had been denouncing to them His approaching judgements because of their sins, and the desolation which would be speedily brought upon their city and nation by the invading armies of their enemies. The Jews, however, fortified themselves against these predictions by their own presumptuous hopes; and confi-

dently trusted that whenever the evil day should arrive, they should be able through their own resources to escape it; that by their wisdom, their might, or their riches, they should find a way to escape, and to defeat the purposes of God. It was, then, with a view to this state of mind, that the prophet, or rather the Lord by His prophet, delivered to them the admonition in the text; in which He warned them against relying on such vain confidences as those to which they were prone to trust; and pointed out to them the only real foundation on which they could build with any hope of safety.

"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."

But the general instruction contained in this passage is as applicable to us as it was to the Jews. We are all prone, my brethren, to rest on false confidences, and to glory in something in which we ought not to glory. The Jews were not the only people chargeable with this folly, or rather with this sin: for

to depend on other things for support or deliverance, instead of on God, is to be guilty of sin; it is a kind of idolatry, putting the creature in the place of the Creator; making flesh our arm, instead of resting solely on the power and goodness of the Lord.

In this world men are all in search of happiness: they are looking to something, in which, according to their notions and belief, they shall find it. They know that they are liable to troubles and difficulties; but they have in their own minds a something, to which they are trusting; and which, as they hope, will at such times yield them consolation and help. And this *something*, whatever it may be, is their glory and confidence. It is this in which they glory and confide, and secretly, if not openly, boast themselves. But the question is, *what* is this their hope and their confidence? Are they glorying in something in which they have any reason to glory? Are they secretly exulting in something, which furnishes good ground for exultation? If not, their glorying is vain, and their exultation will end only in shame, disappointment, and vexation. There are, in fact, many false and mistaken grounds of glorying; but only one that is solid and true. And the text having mentioned some few of the former, such as are most commonly to be found, distinctly describes the latter,

and intimates the excellency of it. In discoursing, then, on the passage, we will adopt this division of it: —

We will consider,

I. The False Grounds of confidence, against which the text offers a solemn warning; and,

II. The True Ground of glorying which it recommends to our preference and adoption.

May the Spirit of Truth enable us to understand things that differ, and so dispose and turn our hearts, that we may refuse the evil, and choose the good!

I. One of the False Grounds of confidence against which we are cautioned in the text, is *Wisdom*: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom."

It is plain that the wisdom here meant is not heavenly wisdom, — "the wisdom which is from above," — but earthly wisdom; or, as it is generally termed, the wisdom of this world; that penetration and sagacity, which many men naturally possess, and some of them to a considerable degree; or that knowledge of various kinds about the things of this world, which they acquire by study and experience. Of this wisdom, then, whether natural or acquired, men are very apt to be proud. They are disposed to trust and confide in it. They rely upon it for the success

of their worldly schemes. Do they see some end which they wish to accomplish — some difficulties which they want to overcome — some dangers which they hope to escape? It is on their own wisdom that they rely for obtaining these objects. They form their plans with a great deal of cunning and foresight; they proceed to execute them with much ability and address; and they think it impossible that schemes so wisely planned, and so ably executed, should fail of being successful. Thus they glory in their wisdom.

But what says the Lord in the text? "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom." And why not? Why should not the man who has wisdom, glory in it? Because all such glorying is vain; because he has at last no real foundation for glorying; because, after all, his wisdom cannot secure success, and may prove in the end, and, if gloried in, certainly will prove, to have been foolishness. It is the Lord who gives success, and whose counsel alone will stand. As for the wisdom of man, He confounds it, and brings it to nought: as for the wise, He takes them in their own craftiness. How often do we see the best-formed human schemes come to nothing! Some little unforeseen event arises, and baffles and defeats all our plans. We have a signal instance of the little value to be placed on human wisdom in the case of

Ahithophel, as related in the seventeenth chapter of the second book of Samuel. He was a man celebrated for his wisdom in the times of David; insomuch that it is said, "The counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God." But the Lord defeated all his wise counsel, which so vexed and mortified him, that he went home, "put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died." So little reason had this wise man to glory in his wisdom.

Another False Ground of glorying is *Might*: "Let not the mighty man glory in his might." By might we may understand either strength or power; strength of body, or the power of rank, station, or influence. Now men are very much disposed to trust and glory in these things.

One man is often proud of his great bodily strength, and relies on it for safety and protection. Confiding in the vigour of his constitution, or the activity of his limbs, he encounters hardships, and exposes himself to dangers; and thus glories "in his might." Another puts his trust in the power and authority which he possesses. His orders are obeyed: his will is done. He has only to speak the word, and his commands are executed. If any resist his authority or dispute his power, he can in a moment overwhelm

and crush them. Nothing can seemingly withstand him. Here, then, is his confidence; he glories in his might."

But the text condemns this ground of glorying equally with the former: "Let not the mighty man glory in his might." There is no real ground for confidence in these things. As "there is no king saved by the multitude of his host;" so "a mighty man is not delivered by much strength." The strongest man may in a moment become weak, and all his bodily powers fail him at once. Was not this the case with Samson? No sooner was the Lord departed from him, but his strength departed from him, and he became weak, like any other man. And if a man does not lose his strength, yet it does not follow, that it may be of any service or protection to him when he most may want it. What was Goliah profited by his great stature and strength? David, trusting in the name of the Lord, assaulted him with a sling and a stone. And his mighty strength, in which he so proudly and impiously boasted, was no security to him. The stone sunk into his forehead, and he fell down dead. — Nor is power any more to be confided in than bodily strength. The mightiest empires have been suddenly overthrown, and the most powerful monarchs destroyed in a moment. Look, for instance, at Pharaoh,

king of Egypt. He trusted in his great power, in his armies, his chariots, and his horses. But what did they profit him in the time of trouble? Plagues of hail, of flies, of locusts, of frogs, desolated his mighty kingdom, and weakened his power, till at length the Red Sea swallowed up him and all his host. Look again at the proud king of Babylon. Walking in his palace, he thus vauntingly spake: "Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdoms, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty? And while the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, saying, 'O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, The kingdom is departed from thee;' and the same hour was the thing fulfilled." What little reason have all these men for glorying in their might!

Another False Ground of confidence is *Riches:* "Let not the rich man glory in his riches." There is something in riches which peculiarly engages the heart of man, and induces him to trust in them. He thinks that if he can but get riches, he shall get *that* which will be a defence and security to him against all troubles and difficulties; and when he has gotten them, he trusts in them. He makes gold his hope, and says to the fine gold, "Thou art my confidence."

How continually do we see people trusting in their wealth, and boasting themselves in the multitude of their riches? "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names." They say to their souls, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant."

Thus it is that men feel and express their confidence in riches. But how vain is such confidence! It is like leaning on a broken reed. They are called *uncertain* riches: and so they are found to be. "They make to themselves wings, and flee away." How often do we see persons reduced from affluence to want! How frequently do we see them plunged into difficulties and afflictions, under which their treasures of silver and gold can yield them no relief. They are wretched and miserable amidst all their wealth. Did the rich man, whose grounds brought forth plentifully, insomuch that he did not know where to bestow his goods,—did he find any security in his riches? No: in the very night of that day in which he had been so foolishly glorying in them, his soul was required of him: and then whose were those things which he had provided? Did

that other rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day, — did *he* find that riches profited him in the day of wrath? No: "in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments." With so much reason does the text declare, "Let not the rich man glory in his riches."

But from the consideration of these False Grounds of confidence condemned in the text, let us now advert,

II. To the True Ground of glorying which it recommends to our preference and adoption.

It is thus described: "Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgement, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord." The ground of glorying here proposed is a right and saving knowledge of God. Let us see, then, *what* is meant by this knowledge; and *why* it is a ground of glorying.

1. The knowledge of God, here meant, is a knowledge of Him in His true character and perfections. It is a knowledge of Him, as exercising loving-kindness, and judgement, and righteousness in the earth, and as delighting in these things. It is a knowledge of Him as being at once a merciful Father and

a righteous Judge; a just God, and yet a Saviour; abounding in mercy, love, and truth; and at the same time hating iniquity, and who will by no means clear the guilty. This is the true character of God as it is made known to us in the Scriptures. But it is such a knowledge of Him as we can obtain in no other way, and from no other source. Men, when left to themselves to form their own knowledge of God, never conceive of Him according to this description. They are apt to think that God is such a one as themselves. They regard Him as a being either too merciful to punish sin, or too just to forgive it: and the consequence is, that they either presumptuously approach Him, on the one hand, without fear; or, on the other, flee from Him in terror and despair. They have no idea of that union of all perfections, which is the glory of the Godhead; and which makes the God of the Bible so different from all the gods of human invention. In fact, it is only as He is revealed in Jesus Christ, that God can be rightly known: for it is only in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ made upon the cross, that the mercy and justice of God can be seen as uniting and exercised together. When God spared not his own Son, but freely gave him up for us all — *there* we see the boundless mercy of God: when it pleased

the Lord to bruise that Son, and to afflict him in the day of His fierce wrath, because he stood in the place of sinners — *there* we see His inexorable justice. Thus in the cross of Christ both these infinite attributes meet; and God is displayed to us glorious in all perfections. Here, then, and here only, we know God. Here we see *what* He is; and obtain that knowledge of Him, of which we are now speaking.

But further, it is not merely the having these views of God, which is all that is here meant by knowing Him. Without having these views we cannot indeed know Him; but we may have them, and yet *know* Him *not* in the sense here intended. The knowledge spoken of in the text is an inward, heartfelt, experimental knowledge of Him. It is such a belief of Him in our hearts, as leads us to fear and love Him, to rely on and confide in Him. It is a knowledge founded on trial and experience. My brethren, do you know any thing of this knowledge by your own experience? Have you so felt yourself a sinner in the sight of God as to be afraid of his judgements? Under a sense of your guilt, have you fled for refuge to his promised mercy in Christ Jesus? Believing in Him, have you found peace to your soul? Have you found sin broken in your heart by His power? Have you found His

grace, given in answer to your prayers, strengthening you against corruption; enabling you to walk in newness of life; and inspiring you with love to God, and to all men for his sake? Do you thus know Christ, and the power of his resurrection? Taught by what he has already done for you, and has wrought in you, can you say with St. Paul, "I *know* whom I have believed; and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day?" Such is the knowledge of which I am here speaking: such a knowledge of God, revealing himself in Christ Jesus, as fills our hearts with faith, and love, and hope, and an earnest desire of living to Him, and devoting ourselves to His service and glory: such a knowledge of God as leads us to see and feel, that Christ is indeed "the pearl of great price," "the one thing needful," that "hidden treasure" without which all other treasures are of no value.

Let us now see *why* this knowledge is a ground of glorying. "Let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me." We have seen why the things mentioned under the former head are *not* proper grounds of glorying. There is no certainty, no security in them. They may promise much, but they can perform little. They may raise expectations, but

they cannot gratify them. They may excite hopes, but they will produce nothing but disappointment in the end, and will only put those who have confided in them to confusion and shame. For these reasons they are *not* to be gloried in. But for the very opposite reasons, the knowledge of which we are speaking *is* to be gloried in. They who know the Lord, in the manner that has been described, have a sure ground of glorying. They glory in that which will never fail, deceive, or disappoint them. "The Lord God is a strong hold in the day of trouble." They who know and trust in Him, shall never be put to confusion. Christ is a rock, and they who build their hope on this rock shall never be ashamed. Their building shall stand in the time of trial: and that storm and tempest, which shall expose the vanity of all other foundations, shall prove the strength and solidity of that rock on which they are founded, who know the Lord. Had not Noah cause for glorying in that knowledge of God which had led him to prepare an ark to the saving of his house; which carried him and his family, when they had entered into it, in safety through the tremendous flood, that destroyed all the worldly and irreligious who know not God? They trusted to their wisdom, their might, or their riches: but what did these things

profit them in the day of wrath? They might formerly have gloried in them; and might probably have despised Noah and his confidence: but at length they found by fatal experience, that while *they* had no ground of glorying left, *he* alone had wherein to glory, even in the Lord; that Lord, whom he had known, and feared, and obeyed, and who proved to him a safety and a refuge when all the workers of iniquity perished. And such will be the case with all who *thus* know the Lord. They will find Him able and faithful to save them to the uttermost. And in the assurance and prospect of this salvation they may now triumphantly glory. What was it but the conviction of these truths, that caused the Apostle to glory in the cross of Christ, and to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord?" Do we need any further proof of the excellency of this knowledge? Christ himself has given it, when He declared in His memorable prayer to His Heavenly Father, "This is *life eternal*, to *know* Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." With reason, with truth, and with justice may we indeed glory in that knowledge, which carries with it, which includes in it, which associates with it, *eternal life*.

And now, my brethren, by way of apply-

ing this subject to ourselves, let me ask you, in what are you glorying? You are all glorying in something. There is a something or other, of which you are proud; on which you are inwardly depending and trusting, as that one thing, which will prove your safety and happiness, your peace and consolation; — but *what* is it? Is it wisdom, or might, or riches? Is it any thing of a worldly nature? Is it any thing in yourself? Is it any thing connected with others, or proceeding from them? Alas, if it be any thing of this kind, it is all vanity, and will prove in the end to be only vexation of spirit. The knowledge of God in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, is the only thing in which you can glory in truth, or can confide with safety. Here is the only foundation for trust and rejoicing. All else is sand. Here is real wisdom, might, and riches. Who is really *wise*, but He who has the wisdom that is from above? Who is really *strong*, but he who is strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might? Who is really *rich*, but he who is rich in faith, and has an interest in the unsearchable riches of Christ? And here, then, are wisdom, might, and riches, in which you may truly glory. — And let me remind you, my brethren, that there is not one of us but who *may* possess this ground of glorying. O what a blessed consideration is this! Worldly wisdom, might,

and riches, fall perhaps to the lot of few: and, consequently, if the possession of these were a just ground for glorying, how few would have cause or reason to glory! But it is not so. These things, so unequally, so partially distributed, afford no ground for glorying. "He that glories, let him glory in this, that he knoweth me the Lord." Here is the true ground of glorying: and what cause, then, ought it to be of thankfulness and joy, that this knowledge, this ground of glorying, is attainable by all; by the simple, the weak, and the poor, as easily as by the wise, the strong, and the rich! In the attainment of this knowledge, these distinctions of mind, of body, or of fortune, are of no avail. You may all attain it, if you will seek it. This knowledge of God, which brings with it salvation, is open to all, is within the reach of all; of the ignorant and the unlearned, the feeble and the indigent. O my brethren, let me entreat you to seek after this knowledge. If you will seek it, and will seek it aright, you will surely find it. Seek to know God. Seek this knowledge of Him in His Word. It is in His Word that His glory shines, and His perfections are made known to us. Seek it in His house. It is *here* especially that the Lord reveals Himself to those who wait upon Him and seek His face. *Here* He causes His goodness to pass before them, and lifts up

upon them the light and favour of His countenance — Seek it, especially, in prayer and supplication. Call upon Him to make Himself known unto you. There is a special promise for your encouragement: "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding — then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." — Follow, I beseech you, the divine instruction here vouchsafed to you. Pray for wisdom, pray for understanding. And may the Lord give you understanding in all necessary things, even that knowledge of Himself, which is eternal life through Jesus Christ!

SERMON VIII.

THE WAYS OF RELIGION WAYS OF PLEASANTNESS AND PEACE.

PROVERBS, iii. 17.

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.

IT is of true religion that Solomon here speaks. Indeed there is nothing else, of which he could so speak, in such terms and with such truth. There is nothing else of which he could say with any approach to truth, that "its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace." He does not indeed speak of true religion by name. He calls it *wisdom*. But this in fact is only another name for the same thing. Wisdom is a scriptural name for religion: a name, which may surely be given to it with the greatest propriety; for *that* must well deserve the name of Wisdom, to which the statement in the text applies. What I purpose in this discourse is to shew the truth of this statement.

May the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding — enable us clearly to perceive these things, and dispose our hearts practically to regard them!

I am to shew then that the ways of wisdom, that is, of real religion, are ways of pleasantness, and that all its paths are peace.

By the ways and paths of religion we are to understand those ways and paths, which true religion prescribes, and in which it leads a person to walk. These may in general be called the ways of faith and obedience; the paths of righteousness, and true holiness. But more particularly to point out and describe these ways and paths, I would observe, that the religious person walks in the fear of God. This it is which forms the grand distinction between him and the ungodly. They have no fear, that is, no *practical* fear, of God before their eyes: but *he* has this fear implanted in his heart; and under the influence of it he lives and acts. Hence it is said, that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom:" it is the first moving spring of all real religion in the soul of man: and hence it is that so much is said in the Scriptures of the importance and necessity of this active principle in the heart.

Now the person, who has this principle in his heart, will necessarily live a very different life, and walk in a very different way, from

him who has it not. Acting under the impulse of this holy fear, He will necessarily desire the favour, and dread the displeasure of God; and to this end he will seek, on the one hand, to do such things as are pleasing to God, and commanded by Him; and on the other hand, to avoid such things as are displeasing to God, and are forbidden by Him. Such a person therefore will have a great regard for the word of God, in which His holy will and commandments are revealed; and will pay a suitable attention to it. And as he sees that God in that word declares that every man is a sinner both by nature and by practice; and that every sinner, who would be pardoned and saved, must believe in and obey His Son Jesus Christ, he will flee in his heart to that Saviour; will put his whole trust in Him for salvation; will avow Him as his Lord and Master; and will try to live to His praise and glory. From this time he leads a new life and walks in new ways. Praying daily for the Spirit of God to support and strengthen him, he struggles against inward corruptions, and outward temptations. He is no longer the slave of the world; no longer follows the multitude in doing evil. The pomps and vanities, the sins and follies, in which the men of this world delight, are henceforth renounced by him: while even his worldly business is no longer conducted with

the same eagerness, and on the same principles, and in the same spirit, which distinguish worldly people. Many other particulars might be specified, which now mark his conduct, and shew the course in which he is walking. But what has been said is sufficient to explain the ways and paths, mentioned in the text; of which it is said, First, that they "are ways of *pleasantness*."

It is a common prejudice against religion, that it is a dull and melancholy pursuit, that it makes people unhappy; deprives them of many pleasures and comforts; and fills them only with trouble and anxiety.

But in contradiction to such representations, it is here expressly asserted that its "ways are ways of *pleasantness*." By which it is meant that a religious life is truly a happy life, that it has in itself peculiar joys and pleasures; and confers on those who walk in its ways delights and consolations which far more than compensate for the privations which it may occasion.

Now, my brethren, if we would but impartially consult our own reason, we might surely be convinced of the truth of this assertion. Only let us recollect that a religious life is the life which God calls us to lead, and that it consists in a life of obedience to Him, and of communion with Him. Is it possible then to suppose that such a life

should not be a happy life? Is not God, who is the author and giver of all good, *able* to make His creatures happy? Must not all their happiness really come from Him? Is He not the best, as well as the greatest, of Beings? And can we then for a moment doubt whether He will make those happy or not, who fear, love, and obey Him? He who made our souls, cannot He make them happy? Cannot He diffuse throughout them a satisfaction, and a delight, which must greatly exceed every other pleasure which they are capable of enjoying? And may we not then justly conclude that He *will* do thus for the soul, which tries to please Him, and labours to live in fellowship with Him? If we were left to the mere inductions of our own reason, we must certainly infer, that the ways of religion "are ways of *pleasantness.*"

But we see, that in addition to this testimony, we have the still stronger witness of the word of God. He has expressly declared in the text (which, though written by Solomon, was yet, as we know, indited by the Holy Ghost,) that this is actually the case. "Her ways are ways of pleasantness." He, who knows what they are, has here told us. Nor is this the only place, in which He has told us the same thing. We read in another place, that there "is a joy, with which a stranger (that is, a stranger to God and true religion) intermeddleth not;" and in the

128th Psalm, we find this strong attestation to the same point. "*Blessed* is every one that feareth the Lord, that walketh in His ways: *happy* shall he be, and it shall be well with him." And how often do we read in the New Testament of that joy, which the Christian experiences, as the fruit and work of the Holy Spirit in his heart? Indeed it is a part of his description that he "*rejoiceth* in Christ Jesus;" that he is "filled with joy in believing," and even at times "*rejoiceth* with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

But we have still another attestation to the truth of the assertion in the text; namely, the testimony of those, who have made trial of the ways of religion, and have found them ways of pleasantness. To what a cloud of witnesses may we appeal on this subject! To the glorious company of the Apostles; to the goodly fellowship of the prophets; to the noble army of martyrs; to the holy church universal throughout all the world; to thousands, to tens of thousands, who, in every age of the Christian church, have walked in the paths of godliness, and have found them their very joy and delight. Nay, we can appeal to many living witnesses also, to many at this day; who abundantly testify the pleasure which they find in the ways of true religion; who for the sake of this plea-

sure are renouncing the pleasures of the world; and if asked, would readily declare, that till they were brought into these ways, they knew not what real happiness was: and that as nothing, which the world affords, can equal the pleasure which they now experience, so there is nothing in this world, which they would take in exchange for it.

Such are the proofs which we have in confirmation of the truth in the text, that, the ways of religion "are ways of *pleasantness*."

But perhaps after all which has been said, some of you may remain still unconvinced. You may aver, that notwithstanding all these witnesses in support of this truth, you have yet stronger witnesses on the other side; namely, your own feeling and experience. 'Religion (you may say) has no charms for us. 'We find no pleasure, we see no pleasantness, 'in it. The duties, which it prescribes, are 'irksome and offensive; the sacrifices, which 'it demands, are very painful: and the way, 'in which it would lead us, is not only 'narrow, but steep, rugged, and wearisome.' Possibly you may say or think thus. But, O my brethren, let me ask you, are you competent judges in this matter? You find fault with the ways of religion. Have you ever tried them? Have you ever set out in them? Have you ever steadily pursued them? Your very account of them, shews that you have

never done these things. If you had, you would think and speak very differently of them. The case is this. The duties and sacrifices, which religion requires, are certainly painful and irksome to our *natural* heart: for that is evil and depraved, and can find no pleasure in the ways of God. But true religion gives a man a new heart. It takes away the evil and depraved inclinations, which he has by nature; and puts into him new desires and inclinations, which make him quite a different man from what he was before: and those things in religion, which before appeared grievous and offensive to him, now become pleasant and agreeable. My brethren, have you ever earnestly prayed to God to give you this new heart, and these new and holy dispositions? Unless you have acted thus, it is quite impossible that you should understand what real religion is, or take any pleasure in it. Instead then of objecting and disputing about things, of which you are and must be ignorant, believe what the Scriptures tell you; what those who have followed the directions of Scripture, tell you, about true religion. Believe, on this united testimony, that it is capable of making you far happier than any thing else can make you; that it has joys and pleasures peculiar to itself, and far surpassing those which sin and the world

can furnish; and under this belief, go and pray to God to make *you* truly religious. Cast yourselves before the throne of His mercy, and humbly beseech him to take away from *you* the heart of stone, and to give *you* a heart of flesh; to put into *you* a new heart and a new spirit, that so you may know Him, and love Him, and take pleasure and delight in His ways. If you follow these directions, you will surely find the benefit of them. You will experience in your own heart and life the truth stated in the text. God, in answer to your prayers, will give you a heart to fear, obey, and serve Him; and you will thenceforth find by your own experience his ways "to be ways of *pleasantness*."

But there is another particular stated in the text. It is said not only that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, but, Secondly, "that all her paths are peace."

Though the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness, yet it is not meant that they who walk in them experience nothing unpleasant. There is nothing in religion itself but what is pleasant and agreeable to the renewed mind; but there are many troubles, trials, and crosses, from which religion does not pretend to exempt us. They who are walking in the ways of Godliness, will meet with many afflictions, such as are common to man, and with some which are peculiar to

Christianity; and such afflictions, while they last, will "not be joyous, but grievous." Compared, indeed, with the joys and consolations of a religious life, these afflictions may be few and light; but still they are afflictions; and, as such, prevent the happiness from being uninterrupted and complete. But even under these circumstances religion provides a remedy peculiarly its own. Though it does not undertake to free men from all inconveniences, sorrows, and temptations, yet it engages to prevent them from being utterly overwhelmed, or even grievously harassed by these things. It inspires them with fortitude, meekness, and hope, under such dispensations; and, thus, in the midst of troubles and difficulties preserves them calm and composed. It gives them an inward tranquillity of mind; and by leading them in all their trials to rely, with humble confidence, on the promises of God in Christ, it fills them at all times with peace, if not with joy; and in the darkest seasons, enables them in patience to possess their souls. And here, then, we may see the truth of that part of the text which is now before us. "*All* her paths are *peace*." True religion sheds abroad in the heart, a peace which no outward things can disturb: "a peace, which (as we are accustomed to hear it described) passeth all understanding:" a peace, of which

the Psalmist declares, that it is a "*great peace*," and that "nothing shall offend them" who have it. This peace, we must remember, was the very legacy which Christ bequeathed to his church, and which He calls *His* peace. "*My* peace," says He to His disciples, "*my* peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." And in another place, "These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace." Hence He is expressly called "our peace:" and thus it was that the prophet had long before declared, in confirmation of the proposition in the text, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee."

Now, my brethren, let me ask you, Is there any thing else of which these things can be truly said, but religion? We see that *it is* said of religion (and experience proves it to be a true saying), that "all her paths are peace." I ask, can this be truly said of any other paths; of the paths of irreligion and ungodliness; of the paths of sin, or of the world? Can it be truly said of these paths, that "they are all peace?" You know that it cannot. The Scripture, indeed, has already decided the question. It has expressly and repeatedly declared, that "there is no peace to the wicked." Those who walk in these paths, find no real peace in them. Such of you, as may unhappily be

walking in them, do you find peace in them? Do you find peace in *all* of them? If you will examine into the matter, and will speak the truth, you must own that you have a great deal of care and anxiety, of remorse and fear, from which religious people are exempt; and that under all your troubles and difficulties you have not those inward resources, to which they are enabled to flee, for support and consolation. When your sinful enjoyments are over, they are gone for ever, and leave only a sting and a wound behind, for which you have no cure, no relief. And you have no way of quieting conscience but by hardening your heart against its clamours, and by returning to a repetition of your sin. And is *this peace?* As to your worldly schemes and plans, when they fail they leave you destitute. You sink down under a weight, from which you have nothing to deliver you. Some favourite idol, some beloved object, is torn from you; and where is your support at such a season? What *do* you know of peace? What *can* you know of it, if you know not Christ? Be assured that the paths of ungodliness are not paths of peace. They are not: they cannot be. In life, while men are walking in them, they are strangers to true peace. And when they come to die, what peace do they then find? What peace can sin and the world furnish on a dying bed? Do they afford any on re-

flection? Do they give any in prospect? No: the ways of ungodliness must end in darkness and dismay. But on the other hand, it is the glory of true religion that it "gives a man peace at the last." When every thing else fails him, his confidence and hope in God remain unshaken. He has walked in the paths of wisdom; and when he comes to die, he can say with holy Simeon of old, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart *in peace*, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

Having thus shewn the truth of the statement in the text, I will now suggest two inferences, which result from it.

1. There is nothing, my brethren, which you ought to value so highly and to seek so earnestly as true religion. If it be true of religion, and of nothing else, that "its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace;" then surely it is your interest and your wisdom to be found in those ways. You are all seeking to be happy: but if you are not seeking your happiness in religion, you are seeking it in a wrong path; you are seeking it, where you can never find it. O that you may be persuaded to seek it where it may be found, even in that "godliness, which has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come!" — Let me particularly press this point upon the young.

You are tempted, from the natural indisposedness of the heart to true religion, favourably to listen to the suggestions of those, who tell you that you need not begin *so early* to walk in the paths of wisdom; that you have many years before you, and that it will be time enough to turn into these paths, when you have had a little more enjoyment in other ways more suited to your taste. But, O my young friends, yield not to such suggestions! There is no truth, no soundness in them. Even on the supposition, that you may have many years to come, (a supposition, however, for which you can have no solid grounds,) yet consider, is it yet *too early* to be happy? Can you begin *too soon* to walk in the ways of pleasantness and peace? Why need you to deprive yourselves for many years, nay for *one* year, nay for *one* single day, of that real satisfaction and delight which you will certainly find in the ways of true religion? May you have grace from above to listen to the voice of friendly admonition! May you from this time resolve and be enabled to keep the resolution, 'Henceforth we will 'serve the Lord. We will follow His ways. 'We will walk in the paths of righteousness for 'His name's sake.'

2. I would infer from the truth in the text, that those, who endeavour to lead men into the ways of Godliness, are their best friends

and real benefactors. Persons are too apt to think the contrary; and often look on those, who would turn them from sin to God, as their worst enemies. This is the way in which the ministers and preachers of the Gospel are often regarded, and represented. When from a sense of duty, and out of love to the souls committed to them, they are endeavouring to prevent the progress and increase of sin, to turn men from their sinful pleasures, to prevent them from following the evil courses to which they are naturally prone, and to bring them into the ways of pleasantness and peace; this is oftentimes the recompense which they receive for their labour of love — to be misrepresented and defamed, as if they were foes and enemies, by the very persons, whose happiness and salvation they are seeking. My brethren, if they were really your foes and enemies, they would be taking a very different part and using very different language; they would be leaving you to yourselves. They would be suffering you to go on without disturbance in your sins. They would be encouraging you in your evil ways. They would be saying to you, 'Fear not, eat, drink, and be merry. 'Take your ease: you have "much goods 'laid up for many years." "To-morrow shall 'be as this day, and much more abundant."' — Such would be the voice and language of

an enemy; and such in fact is the secret suggestion of the great enemy to your hearts, who thus hopes and strives with malignant enmity to ruin your souls. — *Who* then, my brethren, are your friends, your best and real friends, but those who would warn you of your danger; who would discover to you the evil of your hearts, and the peril of your ways; who would show you that the way along which you are travelling is the broad and beaten path of destruction; and that you will never find happiness, till you have turned out of this road into the ways of heavenly wisdom? *Who* are your true benefactors, but those, who would teach you to curb your natural desires; to abstain from unlawful indulgences; and, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world? And such, whatever you may think at present, you will one day know them to have been. God grant, for your own sakes, that your knowledge may not come too late! May you know it, while you have time to profit by your knowledge; before your feet shall stumble on the dark mountains, and you shall perish without remedy!

There is a time coming, when those who are now your best friends, and are anxious to prove themselves such, *must*, if you continue impenitent and ungodly, become *indeed*

your enemies; for they must become your accusers before the tribunal of God. They must then state all that they did, and all that they would have done, for your good and salvation: but they must also state that you rejected their counsel and would have none of their reproof. They would have reclaimed you from your follies and sins: but you were resolved to cleave to them. They would have led you into the paths of pleasantness and peace, but you perversely chose the ways of wickedness and misery. — What, my brethren, will you then say, if you should be found among the persons in question? What will you then say to those charges? O be warned, be wise in time! Flee from the wrath to come. Flee to the Saviour, who stands ready to receive you. Walk with Him, in dependence on his promised help, in the way of faith and holiness; so shall you have happiness in life, hope in death, peace at the last, and glory in eternity.

SERMON IX.

INSTRUCTIONS TO THE UNCONVERTED AND TO THE CONVERTED.

HOSEA, xii. 6.

Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgement; and wait on thy God continually.

THE prophet, having reproved the people of Israel and Judah for their sinful departure from God, had been pointing out to them, as an encouragement to repentance, the example of their pious progenitor, Jacob. He had sought the Lord in the time of his trouble: "he had wept and made supplication unto Him:" "he had power over the angel and prevailed with Him, even the Lord God of Hosts:" who had condescended to wrestle with him; who had submitted to be overcome by him; who was "found of him in Bethel, and there spake with him."

Let the descendants of the patriarch, who was thus distinguished and blessed, copy his example; let them seek God and walk

with Him, as Jacob had done; and they would surely find Him, and receive a blessing from Him, in their turn. He was still *their* God, notwithstanding their departure from Him: He was their covenant God, to whom they had been dedicated in the sacramental rite of circumcision. He was the God of their Father: the God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob. "This was His name for ever: this was His memorial unto all generations."— On these grounds the prophet addresses them in the words of the text, and gives them this salutary admonition. "*Therefore* turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgement, and wait on thy God continually."

The advice, as we see, was most seasonable and important. It directed them, first, to turn to God; and then, secondly, when they had turned, to walk with Him in the duties and comforts of true religion.

But, my brethren, suitable as such advice was to Israel and Judah, it is not to be confined to them. It is no less applicable to us at these times. In fact, there is not a single person in this congregation, or in any congregation on earth, to whom some part or other of the direction given in the text may not be most pertinently and appropriately addressed. For in this and in every congregation, whatever lesser

variations and distinctions of character may exist, still there are two great general descriptions or classes, into which the whole may be divided; and to the one or the other of which every individual belongs, namely, the converted and the unconverted.

There is not a person here present, but who is at this moment, either in a converted or an unconverted state: and consequently there is not a person present to whom the text does not give most important and seasonable instruction. To the unconverted person it says, "Turn thou to thy God;"—to the man in a converted state, it says, "Keep mercy and judgement, and wait on thy God continually."

In discoursing on the passage, it is in this way, and according to this division, that I purpose to use and apply it. While I thus endeavour "rightly to divide the word of truth," and to "give to every one his portion of meat in due season;" may that Blessed Spirit, who alone can give life to the word, bring it home with power and application to the hearts and consciences of you who hear me! We consider,

I. The instruction to the unconverted, "Turn thou to thy God."

There perhaps are persons who may think it strange, that the term "*unconverted*" should be applied to any members of a Christian con-

gregation. They may have considered it as belonging only to heathens and idolaters; or at least to persons, who openly profess their disbelief of Christianity, or who habitually renounce an attendance on its ordinances. Such persons may indeed be said to be in an *unconverted state.* 'But (it may be asked) 'can the same thing be said of those, who 'have been born in a christian country and 'of christian parents; who have been bap-'tized in their infancy; who profess them-'selves Christians; and who, occasionally, at 'least, listen to christian instruction, and join 'in christian worship? Can such persons be '*unconverted* persons, and properly so named?' Yes; my brethren, it is very possible, that they may. For an *unconverted* person is one, whose *heart* is not changed and turned to God: who, notwithstanding his name and profession; notwithstanding the privileges which he may derive from his birth or his baptism, from his participation in christian instruction and christian ordinances, still continues in his natural, carnal, unrenewed state, without the fear and love of God ruling in his soul; still alienated from the life of God, and serving sin or the world in some way or other. Every person who is habitually proud, sensual, or covetous; indulging a self-righteous spirit; or following sin with greediness; or leading a worldly life, careless of his soul and eternity;

every person, who sins without remorse; and has in fact no other rule for his conduct, but his own interest, gain, or will; every such person is an *unconverted* person. And where is the congregation in which persons of this description are not to be found? I wish I could persuade myself, that there are not some at this time within these walls who answer this description. But on the supposition that there be but one, I would say to that one person, with all earnestness, and with all affection, "Turn thou to thy God." Such is the instruction given in the text, corresponding with that given by St. Peter to the Jews, "Repent and *be converted*, that your sins may be blotted out."

All unconverted persons are turned from God. They are estranged from Him in heart and affections. They are got at a distance from God; and are walking in paths, which daily lead them farther and farther from Him. But the end of such a state is ruin: it is the death both of body and soul. There is, and there can be no happiness, but with God: no real peace and enjoyment, but in friendship and fellowship with Him. Those who are turned away from God must be miserable. Their duty then and their interest unite in enforcing the admonition in the text, "Turn thou to thy God." — This is the first thing which an unconverted person must be ex-

horted to do. Is he turned *from* God? Let him turn *to* Him. Forsaking his sinful courses, and evil paths, let him set his face and his feet towards God, and seek Him in new ways. Let him make peace with God, and be reconciled unto Him. Till this be done, they cannot walk together, for they are not agreed. — Let me intreat you, my brethren, to be particularly attentive to this point. The very first step in real religion is *conversion;* that is, the turning of the heart to God. There can be no real religion till this step be taken. An unconverted man cannot spiritually serve, please, or walk with God. He must be turned to God, before he can discharge the duties, or taste the comforts of true religion. Are you then an *unconverted* person? Is your nature still unchanged? Are you walking after the course of this world? Are you turned from God? O then delay not: turn, I beseech you, to Him.

Do you inquire the way? There is but one, even Jesus Christ. He is "the way." He hath Himself opened a way for your return to God and happiness. By the sacrifice of Himself, by His own precious blood-shedding, He has satisfied the justice of God, and has laid open the kingdom of Heaven to all believers. — Would you then turn to God, you must come to Him by this way. You must come pleading in your behalf the blood

of Jesus, and the promises of mercy through Him. You must draw nigh to God in faith; and pray to Him for Christ's sake to be reconciled unto you. You must beseech Him to grant to you the Spirit of Christ, to work in you true repentance, to change your heart, and to shed abroad in your soul that peace which passeth all understanding. It is thus that you must turn to God: and thus turning to Him, you will be graciously and favourably received. He never casts out any souls that turn to Him through Jesus Christ. It is the way which He hath Himself provided and opened for every returning sinner: and every sinner who returns by this way is sure of being welcomed with kindness, and of receiving pardon and peace. O turn, I beseech you, to God, by Jesus Christ. There is abundant encouragement to every unconverted sinner to comply with this exhortation. The text furnishes one of a very interesting nature. It reminds you of the relation in which you stand to God. "Turn thou to *thy* God." Yes: "*thy* God:" take notice of this expression, "*thy* God." Though you may be yet at a distance from Him, in an *unconverted* state, and therefore at present not one of His dear people and children; still, however, there are some respects in which He is even now *thy God;* and the consideration of which may well encourage you to turn and

seek Him. He is the God of thy fathers; the God of thy country; the God of thy church. He is in one sense thy Covenant-God; the God to whom thou wert dedicated in baptism; the God, whose name thou bearest; in whose house thou assemblest with His people; to whose presence thou mayest always have access through the mediation of Christ; whose Spirit is offered to thee; whose ears are ever open to receive thy prayers. In all these respects God is even now *thy God.* In these respects, He even now stands in this near relation to thee. How forcibly should the consideration of these things operate upon you! Are you as yet turned from God? Surely the thought that He is even now *thy God* should constrain you to return to Him. Are you desirous of returning? The same thought should hasten your return, should induce you to lay aside your fears, and with humble confidence to plead his tender relation to you. Recollect that it is He who calls Himself *thy God;* who permits, who teaches you to address Him as *thy God.* And if then you turn to Him, will He not receive and own you as one of His people? Undoubtedly He will. *Thy God* will never reject or disown thee, if thou turnest to Him. He commands you to come; He invites you to turn; He intreats you to be reconciled unto Him: and to fill up the measure of his grace and

mercy, He adds, "I am *thy God.*" May He not call and plead with you in vain! May your heart hear and obey His gracious voice! May you turn unto Him and live! For why will you die? He is *thy God*, and wishes not thy death. You have gone astray like a sheep that is lost. O return unto Him, who will be the Shepherd and Bishop of your soul!

Such is the Instruction which the text, in full agreement with the whole tenour of Scripture, gives to those who are as yet in an *unconverted* state.

Let us now consider,

II. The Instruction vouchsafed to those who are already *Converted.* "Keep mercy and judgement, and wait on thy God continually."

Having described, under the former head, the state and character of the *Unconverted*, it seems hardly necessary to enter into any minute description of the *Converted;* because the representation of the one has, in fact, by contrast, delineated the other. Suffice it therefore to say, that the converted are those who having through grace renounced the ways of sin, and the course of this world, have turned unto God by faith in Jesus Christ their Saviour; with penitent hearts have joined themselves unto Him; and, being justified by faith, have peace with God. They are those, in whose hearts the fear of

God and the love of Christ are uppermost: who, living under the teaching and influence of the Holy Spirit, are now endeavouring to walk by faith, and to serve God in newness of life: who having their affections set on things above, and being moderated in their use of this world, and in their expectations from it, are looking for "a city which hath foundations; whose maker and builder is God."

Such are the *Converted.* And to these the instruction in the text is given, "Keep mercy and judgement, and wait on thy God continually."

The instruction divides itself into two parts. First, "Keep mercy and judgement." It is designed and commanded throughout the Scriptures, that all who turn to God should be careful to maintain good works. They are called with a holy calling; and their life and conversation should accord with it. Let us bear in mind that converted persons are believers in Christ Jesus. They profess to be saved by His grace, and to be redeemed by His blood. And what saith the Scripture? "The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men; teaching us that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious

appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ: who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." But what, then, are those good works of which the ransomed of the Lord should be zealous, and which they should be careful to maintain? The text tells us, "Mercy and judgement." Let such as are turned to God "keep" these, in full agreement with that expostulation of the prophet Micah: "What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy?" Let such as are *converted* to God walk with Him in all holy conversation and godliness; especially, 1st, *in mercy*, that is, in exercising kindness and compassion to all; in relieving and succouring the poor and distressed; in shewing forbearance and meekness under injuries, and patience and gentleness in times of trial and difficulty; in forgiving others as they hope to be forgiven themselves. 2dly, in "judgement," in doing justice and righteousness; in rendering to all their due; in making restitution for wrongs or injuries committed; in doing good and right to others, though it be to their own loss and hinderance. Let them perform these duties; let them produce these fruits, and that not occasionally; not at some times, but habitually and at all times. Let them

keep mercy and judgement; be careful and constant, and conscientious in the observance of them.

My brethren; ye, who have turned to your God, and intend to live as the redeemed of the Lord, as those who have been bought at the price of Immanuel's blood; who partake the means of grace, and profess a hope of glory; attend, I beseech you, to the instruction here vouchsafed. See how you ought to walk and to please God. "Keep mercy and judgement." Prove that you are indeed turned unto God by doing justly and loving mercy, as He requires of you. You cannot be His people, unless you do these things. No real servant of the Lord can be unjust or unmerciful. If you name the name of Christ, depart from iniquity. If you have done any wrong to any man, restore, if *not* fourfold, yet an adequate compensation. Be bountiful after your power, ready to distribute, willing to communicate. So you will prove that salvation is come to your house: so will you make your calling and election sure.

We come to the second part of the instruction vouchsafed to the converted, "Wait on thy God continually."

To wait upon God is to *depend* upon Him, to exercise a strong and lively faith in his promises and power, a believing expectation

of receiving from Him all those supplies and succours of which we stand in need. The man who "waits upon God," is one who looks to Him in humble confidence for every necessary blessing; who in prayer and faith makes known to Him all his desires and wants; relies upon Him to satisfy them all in his own best time and way; and thus, in the language of the Apostle, "is careful for nothing," but casts all his care upon God, knowing that "He careth for him." This is to *wait* upon God: and thus to wait on Him is the duty of every converted person. It is as much his duty to wait on God, as it is to "keep mercy and judgement." The same divine word, as we see, which prescribes the one, enjoins the other also. God, who would have His people that have turned to Him to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world, to do justly and to love mercy, would also have them to exercise a cheerful and consistent dependance on Himself, and to live free from unreasonable and unnecessary cares and fears. My brethren, this is our duty if we are the Lord's people: and if we do not *thus* wait upon Him, we so far come short of our duty; we shew the weakness of our faith; and while we detract from His honour and glory, are virtually injuring ourselves, and losing much

of the comfort and blessing which we might otherwise enjoy.

For in this instance, as in many others, duty and privilege are closely connected together; so that we cannot fail in the one, without missing of the other. "To wait upon God" is indeed our duty; but it is also our privilege; and a privilege which we should highly prize, and earnestly desire and endeavour to enjoy. What can be a higher privilege than, in the midst of this uncertain and fluctuating state of things, to be permitted to cast our burden on the Lord; and in security and confidence to leave it to His infinite wisdom, power, and truth, to provide for us, dispose of us, and order all things for us, as He shall see to be best! What can be a higher privilege than to be invited, in faith and prayer, to commit all our concerns into the hands of Him, who hath loved us, and given Himself for us; who hath Himself all power in heaven and in earth; and who hath assured us in His Word, that all things shall work together for our good! O that we had a stronger and a livelier faith, that so we might more constantly exercise and enjoy this privilege; might taste more of the consolations of our holy religion; and partake more of that peace and happiness, which the blessed Author of it designs that we should experience!

O my Christian friends; ye, who are turned unto God; ye, who serve Him in the Gospel of His Son; who hope in His mercy, and are trying to walk in His ways; why are ye so often cast down with anxieties and fears? Why are ye so often troubled and careful about many things? Why do ye so often take anxious thought for the morrow; and by your gloomy apprehensions add to to-day the burden which does not belong to it? Instead of thus yielding to unbelief and fear, why do ye not *wait* upon God, as He has commanded and invited you to do? Why do you not rely upon His word, and live upon His promise? Why cannot you trust Him? Whom did He ever deceive? When He says to you, "Wait upon me;" put your trust in my word; depend upon my care and providence — are you not ashamed to say, 'I cannot do these things. I cannot thus 'wait, depend, and trust.' And *why* cannot you do these things? On *whom* will you depend and trust, if not upon God? Recollect that He is *thy God:* — *thy* God; not only in the same respects in which He was *thy* God, when thou wast in thy unconverted state, but in another, and a still more important and interesting sense. He is now *thy God*, as being the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom thou believest, and art accepted. He is now *thy* God, thy

Covenant-God *indeed;* pledged to thee by all His great perfections to be thy God and Saviour for ever. He is now *thy* God, to whom thou art turned; whom thou knowest, fearest, lovest, and servest in sincerity and truth; and who hath taken thee to Himself to be *His* in time and in eternity. And cannot you *now* trust Him? Cannot you *now* wait upon Him? What! after He hath done so many things for you — disposed your heart to seek Him; turned you to Himself; pardoned, justified, given to you His Spirit; placed you among his children; taught you to pray to Him; answered your prayers; and kept and preserved you unto this day — after all these manifestations of His mercy and truth, cannot you now depend upon Him, and with a believing confidence in His power, faithfulness, and love, exclaim, in the words and spirit of the inspired Psalmist, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want?"

My dearly beloved, let me intreat you for your own sake to give God the glory. Lay aside distrust and fear, anxiety and unbelief. Walk humbly with your God; and thus walk confidently with Him. Keep mercy and judgement; and thus wait upon your God. Wait upon Him, because He is *your* God: and wait upon Him *continually;* not at some seasons, but at all seasons; not in some things, but in all things. Set the Lord *always* before

you, and let your eyes be *ever* towards Him. Live daily upon His fulness. Live the life you live in the flesh by faith in the Son of God. You cannot expect more from Him, than He is able and willing to do for you and to bestow on you. You are not straitened in Him; be not straitened in yourselves. He has said, "Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it." He has described Himself to us as a God "able and willing to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think." Remember this God is *your* God. O then "keep mercy and judgement, and wait upon Him continually."

SERMON X.

THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

NUMBERS, xxiii. 10.

Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!

THESE are the words of Balaam, one of the most awefully-wicked characters recorded in Scripture. Though professing himself a prophet of the Lord, and actually, on one occasion at least, gifted with the spirit of prophecy, he yet "loved the wages of unrighteousness." Pretending to consult, honour, and obey the Almighty, he yet perversely went in direct opposition to His known and revealed will. In hopes of getting riches and preferment from Balak, he wished and endeavoured to pronounce a curse on the people of Israel, though he knew it to be the divine purpose that they should be blessed. And when all these schemes had failed, in order to ingratiate himself with the Midian-

ites, and to effect his selfish and worldly purposes, he counselled them to seduce the Israelites into sin and idolatry, that thus they might be deprived of the favour and protection of God.

Surely we can hardly conceive a more wicked and diabolical character; or a more aweful instance of the hardening nature of sin, and of the truth of that scriptural declaration, that "the love of money is the root of all evil." — Such, however, was the man, who, in the very midst of his impious attempts and purposes, uttered this memorable wish in the text, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" — Perhaps you may think it strange that such a man should utter such a wish. But there is nothing really strange in this proceeding. There has seldom, perhaps, been a wicked man in the world, who, according to the light he has had, has not at times uttered, or felt at least, some wish of the same kind. It only proves the strength and clearness with which conviction may occasionally force itself on the consciences even of the ungodly; and how powerfully for a time they may feel the vast importance of those divine truths, which nevertheless they obstinately and habitually resist. Though Balaam came with the full intention of cursing the people of Israel, yet he was over-ruled and constrained to pro-

nounce a blessing on them: and in this act of blessing them, he was so filled with a conviction of their safety and security, of their happiness and felicity, as the chosen and favoured people of the Lord, that at the moment he could not but feel a desire of having his own lot and portion among them. Carrying forward his contemplations beyond the limits of time, he felt for the instant "the powers of the world to come:" and impressed by a persuasion of that "glory, and honour, and immortality," which awaited the people of God, when this transitory scene of things shall have passed away, he could not refrain from passionately exclaiming, "Let *me* die the death of *the righteous*, and let *my* last end be like *His!*"

Who would have thought that after these convictions and impressions, this desire and wish, this wretched man should at last miserably perish among the enemies of Israel and of God! Yet such was the case. Pursuing, as we have already noticed, his iniquitous purposes in the land of Midian, he there met with an untimely end; and in the midst of his unrepented sins was slain by the avenging sword of the Israelites. My brethren, what an aweful and instructive warning does this story hold out to us! How forcibly does it admonish us, not to grieve the Spirit of God by resisting conviction, and by stifling

his heavenly motions in our hearts; nor to rest satisfied with vain and delusive wishes, as if they could carry us to heaven. I would have you go far, very far beyond this wicked man. I would have you not only to *wish* to have your portion with the people of God hereafter, but really to *have* it. May God of his mercy grant, that when we come to die, we may *indeed* die the death of the righteous, and may have our last end like his! The hour is fast approaching when death and eternity will be near to every one of us. It cannot now be far off from any; and it may be very nigh to some. And with this serious and affecting truth before us, let me now lead you briefly to consider two things.

I. What is that particular which exclusively distinguishes the death of the righteous, and makes their end so desirable.

II. How *we* can attain this object so as to have *our* last end like *theirs*.

I. In shewing what is that particular which exclusively distinguishes the death of the righteous, and makes their end so desirable, it may perhaps be expected that I should give some description of the righteous, and point out *who* they are. But, as I may have occasion to say something on this point more particularly when I come to the second division of the discourse, I shall now simply

observe in passing, that by the righteous are meant true Christians, really religious persons; those who are indeed the servants of God, "the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand."

Such are the righteous. What, then, is that particular which exclusively distinguishes their death, and makes it so desirable? It is plain from the expression in the text, that the particular here signified, be it what it may, is something which is common to the death of *all* the righteous alike. "The *death of the righteous*" clearly means such a death as they *all* die. "Their end," so far as the point here intended to be noticed is concerned, is the same to all.

Hence, then, it follows, in the first place, that the particular in question has nothing to do with the *circumstances* of their death; for these are by no means the same to all. in this respect the righteous may differ very widely from each other; or they may even resemble the wicked in their death. Some may come quietly and slowly to their end; others may be cut off by a sudden and violent death. One may die in his bed; another may be slain in the field of battle. One may breathe his last in the bosom of his family, surrounded by his children and friends; another may expire in a distant land, in the midst of strangers and enemies.

One may be worn out by painful and agonizing diseases; another may gently drop into the grave, as the fruit falls when it is ripe. In these respects, as Solomon says, "all things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked." So far, then, as relates to the *circumstances* of their death, there is nothing which exclusively distinguishes the end of the righteous.

The same observation may be made, in the second place, as to the apparent *state of their feelings*. This is no proof or criterion whether a man be really righteous or not. It does not necessarily follow that because a man is righteous, he should die in a lively and triumphant frame of mind: and that when death approaches, he should feel nothing but exultation and joy. The contrary is oftentimes the case. He frequently experiences, in that aweful crisis, much darkness, doubt, and fear; and perhaps even goes out of the world without giving any certain indication that the clouds are dispelled, and light diffused over his soul. On the other hand, the end of the wicked may be full of composure and confidence: for as the Psalmist remarks, "there are no bands in their death." They often die without expressing any doubt or apprehension in their dying moments; without manifesting any terrors of conscience, or alarms for their

safety. Neither frightened by the remembrance of the past, nor terrified by the prospect of futurity, they die securely; and would impress the by-standers with a conviction, that they feel perfectly happy, and have a good hope of heaven. So far, then, as relates to the *apparent state of their feelings*, there is nothing which exclusively distinguishes the death of the righteous.

In what particular, then, does this distinction consist? It consists in the *real, actual state of the soul at death.* The righteous, whenever they die, die in a state of favour and peace with God. There is no charge against them; no condemnation to them. God is reconciled unto them. He is their friend and father; and all His perfections are pledged to make them happy and blessed for ever. Nothing stands in the way between them and immediate, perfect, and everlasting felicity. As soon as they die, they are present with the Lord, and enter into His joy. The circumstance which makes death in itself so dreadful, is its sting, unpardoned sin. Sin, unpardoned, will sink the soul into everlasting misery. It is the worm that never dieth. But the sins of the righteous *are* pardoned. *To them*, therefore, death hath lost its sting. It is a harmless, a vanquished enemy; no longer the king of terrors, but a messenger of peace:

a messenger sent to fetch them home to their Father's house, to those mansions of endless joy and bliss, which He has prepared for them in heaven. Such is the death of the righteous. Such is the grand peculiarity which marks *their* end, and makes it different from that of others. They die in peace, and enter into glory. And this is equally the case with *all* the righteous without exception or distinction. Whatever may be the *outward circumstances* of their death; whatever may be their *inward feelings* at its approach, yet, dying, they "are blessed;" "for they rest from their labours." "God will wipe away all tears from their eyes: neither will they have any more death, neither sorrow nor crying: neither will there be any more pain." "Their sun shall no more go down, neither shall their moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be their everlasting light; and the days of their mourning shall be ended."

But to obtain a still clearer and more striking view of the death of the righteous, let us for a moment contrast it with that of the unrighteous; of those who die without being at peace with God. What is their state at death? No sooner do they die, but they feel that sting of death which they must feel for ever. The curse of unpardoned sin fastens upon them with an un-

supportable anguish. No sooner do they close their eyes, and close them for ever on this scene of things, but they lift them up in Hell, being in torments. No veil, no screen is any longer interposed between their guilty souls and their offended God. His wrath, like a consuming fire, seizes on them, and kindles in their souls a burning flame which never will be quenched. View, I say, this end of the unrighteous; compare it with *that* of the righteous; of those whose sins are entirely pardoned; whose peace with God is for ever made; who have no sting to endure, no wrath or curse to encounter; and then see what is that particular which so exclusively distinguishes the death of the righteous, and makes *their* end so desirable. With reason, indeed, might Balaam, in the full contemplation of these aweful events, in the inspired view of these tremendous realities, break forth into the impassioned exclamation in the text, and say, "Let *me* die the death of the righteous, and let *my* last end be like *his!*" Miserable man! He saw these things; he felt this wish; he uttered these words: but as for attaining the object in view, he took no steps; he made no efforts towards it. Doubtless, he knew the steps which must be taken in order to make the end of the righteous his own. He could not be ignorant of the way, the

only way which would lead to it. But he had no heart to follow this way. He loved the wages of unrighteousness. How was it *possible* that he could die the death of the righteous?

My brethren, may we have grace to profit by this man's wickedness! May we not only wish with him, as we surely must wish, to have our last end like that of the righteous; but may we also seek, and strive, and labour to have it thus! To this end let us now briefly consider,

II. *How* we can attain this object.

Surely it is not merely by wishing, however fervently, nor by uttering our wishes, however ardently, that we shall die the death of the righteous. No, my brethren, I need not use many words to convince you of this truth. Nor do I feel that I need use many to convince you of another truth, equally plain and equally important: namely, that those only will die the death of the righteous, who, themselves, *are* righteous. The end and the character go together. They are intimately united, and can never be separated. The one must be the step to the other. None but those who partake of the character, can partake of the end. The death is the death of the righteous; and none but the righteous can die this death. Do you ask, then, How *you* may attain this

object, and have *your* last end like his? I answer, by becoming yourself righteous. There is no other way: but this will be a certain, an effectual way. Being righteous, whenever you die, you will assuredly die the death of the righteous. And here, then, some other questions occur. You may be desirous of asking me, *What* it is to be righteous? and *How* you may become so? These are indeed essential questions. And may I be enabled to answer them aright!

To be righteous, then, in the language and meaning of Scripture, is to be in a justified state; in a state of acceptance with God. Did I not shew you that the righteous are blessed in their death; because they die in peace with God, because their sins are pardoned, and their persons accepted by Him? But these privileges are the consequences, not of their death, but of their justification. It is by "being justified that they have peace with God." Death finds them in a justified state, and so becomes blessed to them. Let me explain this matter a little more clearly to you.

A justified state is not our natural state. *That* is a state of sin and guilt. In our natural state we commit sin, and live in the practice of it. But no one, who is in a justified state, allowedly commits and practises sin. It is a new state into which he is brought by the

grace of the Gospel; a state of peace and favour; a state of pardon and acceptance. He has received remission of sins, and a title to heavenly glory: and together with these gifts he has been made partaker of a new nature, which leads him henceforth to live a new and holy life. As the Scripture says, he "walks not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Mark, then, the change which has taken place. He was once an unpardoned sinner, and a child of wrath. He is now accounted a righteous person, and is by adoption a child of God. In his former state he took pleasure in sin, and loved and followed the world. In his present state he avoids sin, and denies his sinful inclinations; and is no longer governed by the love or fear of the world. In this state he henceforth lives, fearing God, and walking in his ways. And so living and walking, he is blessed. God regards him with favour; owns and protects him as a child; provides for his wants; and inwardly guides, strengthens, and comforts him by his Spirit. This is the justified, the righteous man; and this man, whenever he may die, at whatever time, and under whatever circumstances, dies, as he lives, in peace and favour with God; and leaving this world of trouble, sorrow, and sin, enters, as we have already observed, into the presence and joy of his Lord. And this answer will suf-

fice for the first question, What it is to be righteous? The second is this, *How* you may become so?

My brethren, there is only one way in which you can become righteous or justified. It is God alone who justifies. He it is who alone can pardon your sins, can account you righteous, can put you among His children, can give you a title to heaven, and can change and renew your hearts. All this is God's work; and He does all this *freely*, without any respect to your merits and deservings. He does it of His grace. But remember that it is for Christ's sake that He bestows these gifts and blessings; in consideration of what *He* hath done and suffered for sinners; and He bestows them only on *those* that believe in the Saviour whom He has appointed, and that receive Him and trust in Him as *their* Saviour. Here, then, you see *who* are justified persons. They are real believers in Jesus Christ: and *how* you must become a justified person, namely, by believing on Him, with the heart for your own salvation. "Being justified by *faith*, we have peace with God." "By Him," that is, Jesus Christ, "all who believe are justified from all things." "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation *through faith*

in his blood for the remission of sins." This is the language and statement of Scripture on this subject: and we can give you no other direction than that which the Scriptures give you. Would you die the death of the righteous? Be righteous. Would you become righteous? Believe with your heart, on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our righteousness. As a poor sinner, ready to perish, flee to this Saviour for life: humbly confess to Him your sins; cast yourself at the foot of His cross; pray for mercy, for the pardon of your sins through His blood, which has been shed for sin; pray for faith to believe in Him as your Saviour; pray for grace to convert and make new your heart. Thus seek and you will find: thus ask, and you will have: thus knock, and it will be opened unto you. You will be righteous. God will justify you, and will do for you all that you have prayed for. He will put you among His children, and will give you the child's best portion, a new and holy heart to love, delight in, and obey Him. He will be with you through life: and when you come to die, He will not forsake you. "You shall die the death of the righteous, and your last end shall be like his." Death, whatever may be the circumstances of it, shall be to you the gate to heaven, the door to everlasting rest and joy. Though like Lazarus you

may breathe your last even in want and misery; yet angels shall attend your dying moments; shall minister consolation to your departing spirit; and shall transport it, when released from the prison of the body, to the mansions of eternal day, to the bosom of Abraham, to the blissful presence of your Father and your God. Then, my brethren, will you better know, than words can now describe to you, the blessedness of dying in the Lord; the unspeakable felicity of having your lot and portion with the people of God. O, that you might all be induced to seek this portion in earnest for yourselves! O, that you might all be persuaded, having "laid aside every weight, and the sin, which does so easily beset you, to run with patience the race that is set before you, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith!" O that you might all be brought to the same happy mind with the apostle St. Paul; with him "to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, so that you may win Him, and be found in Him, not having your own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith!" Thus, with the same apostle, when you come to die, you will be enabled to say, "To me to die is gain;" and with him also to look forward

in hope to that crown of righteousness which will be laid up for you in heaven. "Thus indeed you will die the death of the righteous, and will have your last end like his."

SERMON XI.

GOD'S MYSTERIOUS DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE.

PSALM lxxvii. 19, 20.

Thy way is in the sea; and thy path in the great waters; and thy footsteps are not known. Thou leddest thy people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

IN this Psalm the inspired writer records a temptation to which he had been exposed, and the way in which he had overcome it. The temptation had been one, to which the people of God are at all times liable; and with which they are frequently assaulted; a temptation to despondency. Under the pressure of some heavy affliction, the particular nature of which he does not state, his spirits had been deeply affected. "My sore ran," (says he) "in the night season, and ceased not, my soul refused to be comforted." At such seasons the usual resource and consolation of a pious soul is meditation upon God; upon his promises and perfection: but in the

present case, such meditation, instead of healing the wound, aggravated it. "I remembered God, and was troubled; I complained, and my spirit was overwhelmed." His mind, instead of being composed and cheered with the thoughts of God, became more confused and perplexed, from the apprehension of His Majesty, Justice, and Holiness. At length, not finding any peace and comfort, he fell into the usual state of supposing that he never should find any. Such at least was the apprehension, which fear and unbelief suggested to his mind. "Will the Lord cast off for ever? And will He be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore?" Such had been his temptation.

He next recounts the way in which he had been delivered out of it. This had been by calling faith into exercise, and by reviewing the recorded dealings of God with His people in past times. I said, "This is my infirmity." Here we see the secret workings of faith; belief beginning to operate against the suggestions of unbelief. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" 'No: to entertain such 'a thought is weakness indeed, and shows how 'little is my faith. "It is my infirmity." I 'cannot seriously admit of such a conclusion. 'There are no just and reasonable grounds for

'it. There is nothing in the past history of 'the Church and of God's gracious dealings 'with it, that can justify any apprehension 'of this kind. "I will remember the years 'of the right hand of the Most High. I will 'remember the works of the Lord; surely 'I will remember thy wonders of old. I will 'meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy 'doings."'

In this way he found his fears dispersed, and his hope revived. Looking back on the lives of the Patriarchs, as related in the sacred writings, he saw that though the Lord had afflicted, He had not forgotten them; though He had troubled, He had not forsaken them; while in that great national deliverance of Israel out of Egyptian bondage, there was exhibited for the benefit of His Church in all ages, a striking example of the way in which God frequently deals with his people, bringing them into troubles and difficulties, and then causing those very afflictions to work beyond all expectation for their good: so that instead of being cast down and desponding under their trials, they had in truth reason to rejoice in, and to be thankful for them. It is this view of the case, which the Psalmist describes in the text; when having come out of his trouble, and now better understanding the design and tendency of the divine proceedings, he thus

bears testimony to the mysterious, but, gracious, way in which God often deals with His people. "Thy way is in the sea; and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. Thou leddest thy people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron."

In further discoursing on these words, my intention is,

I. To give a clearer explanation of the Doctrine conveyed in them; and

II. To draw from it some salutary Instructions.

And may the same Spirit, which has caused this passage to be written for our profit, accompany with His special blessing our meditations on the truths contained in it!

I. In explaining the doctrine conveyed in the text, I must begin with reminding you that I have already represented it as descriptive of the *mysterious*, but gracious way, in which God often deals with His people. With respect to them, "His way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known." These words set forth the *mysteriousness*, in which the divine dispensations are frequently involved. Verily God is a "God, who hideth himself." "Clouds and darkness are round about Him." "His judgements are unsearchable, and His

ways past finding out." And in nothing is this truth more evident than in his dealings with His people. He leads them by a way they know not. He often brings them into sore troubles and difficulties; obstructs their paths; crosses their inclinations; and appears, perhaps, to forsake and disregard them. They call upon him; but He seems to turn a deaf ear to their cry. His providences expose them to some imminent danger; and when they look to Him for deliverance, He stands afar off; and instead of lessening, appears only to increase the danger. But in the mean time, what are His real thoughts towards them, but thoughts of peace and not of evil? In the midst of all their trials and difficulties, He is secretly planning their happiness, and causing all things to work together for their good. While "His way is in the sea, and His paths are in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known" — all around Him is darkness and mystery, — yet He is still "leading His people like a flock," and overruling all events for their benefit. His eye is continually upon them for good; and His hand unceasingly exercised in their protection and preservation. Does He conduct them by a rough and steep and rugged road? The reason is, because He knows that this road is the safest, and in the end the shortest to that land of rest and peace, where their

souls will be most certainly and most permanently refreshed. Does He lead them by a path full of dangers and difficulties? It is because He sees that every other road would expose them to more real dangers, and would involve them in greater difficulties.

But to make this truth still plainer, let us illustrate it by the example adduced in the Psalm from which the text is taken.

The people of Israel, groaning under the cruel bondage of the Egyptians, cried unto the Lord. And in compassion to their sufferings, in answer to their cry, and in fulfilment of the promises made to their fathers, the Lord sent them deliverance by the means of Moses and Aaron. Having desolated Egypt with His plagues, and compelled its haughty king to let the prisoners go; the Lord brought them out of the house of bondage with a mighty hand and a stretched out arm. And having thus delivered them out of Egypt, He promised to conduct them into the rich and fruitful land of Canaan. But how did He proceed in fulfilling His promise? Instead of leading them along the nearest, the straightest, and the safest road, as it would have appeared to them, He directed them to take another route, which brought them into the wilderness; and there, by entangling them in the defiles and passes, seemed to prevent their further progress. On either

side, high and impassable mountains shut them in; while in front, an arm of the Red Sea kept them from advancing. But no sooner did Pharaoh and the Egyptians hear of their situation, than being already forgetful of the divine judgements, and grieved that they had let the people go, they resolved to pursue, and compel them to return. Accordingly, having collected all their chariots and horsemen, a large and powerful body, they followed after the fugitives, and overtook them in the circumstances described. And now the destruction of Israel appeared to be certain. Shut in by the wilderness, before them was the sea, behind them Pharaoh and all his host. An unarmed multitude, more than half of them women and children, laden with goods and clothes, and all their substance, what resistance could they make against such an enemy? They could not contend with them; they could not escape from them. Nothing but death or captivity stared them in the face. No wonder that they were sore afraid, and cried unto the Lord, and gave way to complaining and despair, as many of them did. But mark the sequel. The Lord, who had brought them, and had *designedly* brought them into this difficulty, found a way of escape. At His command, the sea itself opened a passage to them, as the Psalmist here expresseth it. "The waters

saw Thee, O God: they saw Thee, and were afraid: the depths also were troubled." "The Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind, all that night, and made the sea dry land; and the waters were divided, and the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea, upon the dry ground; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left." Thus they passed safely on. But what became of their pursuers? Blindly following them, in their rage and folly, they rushed into the midst of the sea, and the waters returning to their place, they were all drowned. Their discomfiture is thus described by the Psalmist: "The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heavens: the lightnings lightened the world; the earth trembled and shook." And what was the final result? The Israelites not only went safely through the sea, and thus escaped from their enemies: but saw in the morning those very enemies dead on the sea-shore. They who had thus troubled them, would trouble them no more for ever. The very circumstance which had seemed to be their destruction, proved in the end their salvation. How truly, on contemplating those events, might the Psalmist go on to say

in the text, "Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters; and thy footsteps are not known." He could say those things literally: for we see that the way which the Lord opened for his people, *was* "in the sea, and His path had been in the great waters." But he could also say it in a figurative sense. The way of the Lord had been very mysterious. His dealings with Israel had been dark and inscrutable, till the event shewed the wisdom and mercy with which He had acted. He had seemed to be leading them into danger, but He was in fact consulting their safety. He had appeared to be regardless of their interest, to be forgetful of their dangers; and to be conducting them into peril and ruin, without foresight or thought. But in the mean time, He was really, however secretly, performing the part of the kind and the good Shepherd. He was "leading His people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron." Notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, He was planning their safety and happiness; and instead of leaving them to perish in the difficulties, into which He had purposely brought them for a season; He was designing by those very difficulties to work out for them a great and a permanent security. May we not exclaim with St. Paul, "O the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How un-

searchable are His judgements! and His ways past finding out!"

Having thus more clearly explained the Doctrine contained in the text, I shall proceed,

II. To draw from it some salutary Instructions.

One lesson which we may learn from the Doctrine which we have been discussing, is to form a right estimate of the safety and happiness of the people of God. This is a point, on which worldly and irreligious people are in general very ignorant; and on which the people of God themselves frequently entertain very low and inadequate conceptions. They perceive not their own privileges, and consequently they neither love nor act up to them. They neither live in the enjoyment of them, nor act up to the duties which they impose on them. It is a truth, which every day confirms, that many are the afflictions of the righteous. Those who fear God, and conscientiously serve Him, are not exempted from trials and troubles. They are exposed to sorrows and calamities like other persons; and indeed are oftentimes afflicted more severely than others. Under the pressure and experience of these things, they are often cast down in their souls, and are tempted to conclude that it is no better with them than with others; while wicked and ungodly

persons are hardened by these things in their sins, and perceive, as they think, no benefit in seeking and serving God. Nay, possibly they draw a directly opposite conclusion; and seeing, as they may sometimes see, that the troubles of the righteous are increased, or even occasioned by their religious scruples and conscientious conduct, they are induced to believe that religion is a hurtful thing; that it only tends to make people more unhappy than they would otherwise be; and, consequently, instead of diminishing, aggravates the afflictions of life.

But how directly does the Doctrine before us tend to correct these mistaken notions, and to give us juster ideas on the subject? It teaches us that those afflictive dispensations, with which the righteous are so often visited, far from being hurtful to them, are in reality blessings in disguise. It teaches us, that those troubles and trials, in which they are frequently involved, though doubtless for the present not joyous, but grievous, are yet but the gracious and necessary discipline with which their Heavenly Father is training them up for future usefulness and honour; which are even now all working together for their good; and in the end will bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. It teaches us that though the ways and dealings

of God with his people may be often to us hidden and mysterious, nay apparently gloomy, and even threatening; yet that they are in fact all ordered in wisdom, mercy, and love; and will be found at last to have been those very means, by which their safety, peace, and happiness will have been most effectually secured. Look, my brethren, at the history of the Patriarch Joseph. Hated by his brethren on account of his piety, he was cruelly sold by them into servitude, and carried down as a slave into Egypt. Hated by his mistress, because, from a religious principle, he would not comply with her wicked solicitations, he was falsely accused, cast into prison, and there left to endure, to all appearance, a hopeless and endless captivity. On regarding this portion of his history, we might, perhaps, be tempted to ask, 'What good did he derive from his religion 'and piety? They only involved him in 'troubles and difficulties. They procured 'for him nothing but bonds and imprison-'ment, but misery and disgrace. This was 'the fruit of his serving God. The Lord 'instead of helping and protecting, forgot and 'neglected His servant.' But what is the lesson which we learn from the sequel of his history? We there see that all his suffering was the appointed path to happiness and honour. We there see that every affliction,

every indignity, which he underwent for conscience sake, were so many steps by which the Almighty in His secret providence was conducting him to that exalted station, which he filled during a long course of years; and in which he had the gratification of becoming, not only the benefactor of the whole land of Egypt, but the preserver of his father, and of all his unnatural brethren. With what delightful feelings, with what a heartfelt conviction, would Joseph have borne witness to the truth in the text: He had found indeed by a most happy experience, that though the Lord's way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and that His footsteps are not known; yet that He still leadeth His sheep like a flock, and is conducting them, even by the way of the wilderness, into green and fruitful pastures.

A second lesson, which we may learn from the Doctrine in the text, is to see our duty in time of trouble and darkness. We have already observed that at such times, and under such circumstances, we are naturally prone to despond, and to give up all as lost, and to think that our difficulties will never be at an end, but will at last overwhelm and sink us for ever. Such are the suggestions, which *of ourselves* we are prone to entertain: because of ourselves we are prone to unbelief and impatience. Naturally, we have, and

can have, no faith in the power and promises of God: and therefore, so far as we are under the influence of *natural* principles, we cannot see and understand the dealings of God, when dark and mysterious; nor feel and act under them as we ought. It is only by the light of His word, that we can come to this knowledge, and by believing it, can act as our duty requires. The first thing, therefore, which, in seasons of darkness and trial, we have to do, is to stir up our faith into exercise. We must check our natural disposition to despondency, by calling to mind what is written in Scripture, with respect both to the dealings of God, with His people in past ages, and to His designs and purposes in these His dispensations towards them. Let us "remember His wonders of old time," and bear in mind that He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He is the same God that He ever was: the same in love, mercy, and power, in truth, and in faithfulness, that He has been in ages past. And next let us call to mind the promises, the precious promises, with which His Word abounds, the promises, which we every where find in Scripture, of safety, protection, and deliverance to His people, sooner or later, in every time of trouble. Thus exercising our faith in His Word, we shall find our despondings fears lightened, if not removed. We

shall learn by degrees, in the darkest night of affliction, to possess our souls in patience, and notwithstanding seeming obstacles, to hope in God's mercy, to look forward to the time, when our burdens will be alleviated, and light return to our soul; and in the mean time to expect and pray, that His present gloomy dispensations towards us will be overruled and sanctified to our good; and will by His blessing on them, be made the means of rendering us hereafter fitter for His mercies, and more capable of serving and glorifying Him either in this world, or in the next. Here then is our duty, in such times and circumstances as those described in the text. Is it with us a day of adversity? Are we in heaviness through manifold temptations? Do we find ourselves entangled in difficulties, out of which we see no way of escape? The more earnestly we strive for deliverance, the more deeply do we appear to be involved? If this be the case with us, yet let us not be cast down as men without hope. There is no ground for despair. The Lord's hand is not shortened, that He cannot save us. Nor are these trials and troubles any certain proof of His displeasure against us, or of His forgetfulness of us. He has wise reasons for all that He is doing; and may have merciful reasons too, as we shall find in the end, if we will but trust in Him,

and exercise faith and patience in His power and love. Let our afflictions only bring us nearer to Him, let them lead us to humble ourselves under His hand; to seek of Him grace, to repent of our sins; to kiss the rod with which He is smiting us; to bear the indignation of the Lord because we have sinned, till He shall be pleased to take it away. Let this be at such times our study and endeavour; and we shall find in the end, as Israel, as Joseph, as Job, as David found, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy; and that in very faithfulness He hath caused us to be afflicted. Hearken to the direction of the prophet, so very applicable to this subject. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant; that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

Nor do these remarks apply more forcibly to troubles of a personal and private nature, than to those of a public kind, relating to the Church of God, and to the interests of true religion in the world. It has often happened, that God has brought His Church into very gloomy circumstances: and His people, who have the interests of His holy religion deeply at heart, have been often cast down with fear at the prospect of the danger which threatened it, and on looking

after those things which seemed to be coming on the earth. But at such times, there is no just reason to despair; Christ, who hath all power in heaven and in earth, will not forget or forsake His Church. It is engraven on the palms of His hands: and He will surely protect it in every danger, and give it the victory over every enemy. We are assured that the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it, nay, more, "that no weapon formed against it shall prosper:" nay, more, that "when the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard against him." What ground then is there for despondency? What cause for fear? He that sitteth in heaven, will laugh all His enemies to scorn. He will surely make His cause triumphant over every foe. Let us feel assured of this truth. Let us remember how often He has interposed in behalf of His Church; and has over-ruled its apparent dangers for its increase and prosperity. Let us bear in mind that He is still the same; and that with the same arm with which He hath already gotten the victory, He will continue to gain it in every time of need. Be the Heavens at any time overcast; be the prospect dark, threatening, tempestuous; yet wait awhile in patience. The clouds will disperse; a calm will suc-

ceed; and the sun will shine forth with renewed splendour, and will cheer and brighten every object. "Weeping may endure for the night; but joy cometh in the morning."

SERMON XII.

TRIAL OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH.

HEBREWS, xi. 17, 18, 19.

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son; of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

OF all the characters recorded in the Old Testament, there is not one more distinguished than Abraham. He is expressly called the "friend of God;" and is set forth in Scripture both as the pattern, and the father of all true believers. His whole history is deserving of peculiar attention; and abounds with the richest instruction. Among the other incidents of his eventful life, the one to which the text refers, is pecu-

liarly striking. It is related in the 22d chapter of Genesis: and contains an account of that very remarkable trial, by which God was pleased to exercise, and prove the faith of His servant. The whole circumstance is so singular and instructive, especially when explained by the view given of it in the text, that it may justly lay claim to a particular consideration.

In the chapter to which I have referred, we find it written, "And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham." By which expression it is not meant that God put a temptation in Abraham's way to induce him to sin. No, that were impossible. We are reminded by St. James, that as "God cannot be tempted with evil, so neither tempteth He any man." To *tempt* in this passage, signifies nothing more than to *try*. God *tried* Abraham: He put Him to a *trial;* which is the very expression used in the text, where it is said, that "Abraham, when he was *tried*, offered up Isaac." He was placed in consequence of the command which he received from God, in such circumstances, as necessarily tended to *try* the strength of his principles, and to *prove* whether his profession of religion was sincere or not. In this way God tried him: as in after time He tried his posterity in the wilderness, when He led them forty years "to hum-

ble them, and to prove them, and to know what was in their hearts, whether they would keep His commandments or no." And in this same way God may be said at all times to *tempt* His professing people; for by His providence He is continually bringing them into situations and circumstances, which prove to them heavy trials, and tend to shew beyond a doubt the truth or the falsehood, which is in their hearts.

But here let us not fall into an error; let us not suppose that God stands in need of these trials in order to discover the real state of men's hearts. He sees the secrets of *all* hearts: and "needeth not that any should testify of man: for He knows what is in man." It is not to inform himself that He tries and tempts mankind; but that by these trials and temptations, He may answer many important ends; and may prepare the way for the future judgement. It is thus that He detects the specious hypocrite, and leaves him without excuse: or discovers to His people the strength or weakness of their graces; and so either encourages or humbles them, as their case requires: or takes occasion from their example, as in the instance of Abraham before us, to instruct, admonish, or console their fellow-sinners.

Let us now proceed to the consideration of this particular trial: which is doubtless written

for our admonition. Let us see the nature of it, and where the peculiar strength of the temptation lay. "God called Abraham, and he said, Behold, here I am. And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."

Such was the divine Revelation. It demanded prompt obedience to a command of the most extraordinary kind. It enjoined the immediate performance of an act, against which every natural feeling revolted. It required of a father the sacrifice of parental affection, without assigning any reason for so singular a requisition; while every word in which it was delivered, seemed designed purposely to wound and agonise a parent's heart. "Take now" — whom? — "thy son," what son? — "thine only son," the son of thine old age, the child promised to thee for so many years and waited for so long in faith, "Isaac," him, "whom thou lovest;" and as the words evidently mean, with an affection peculiarly tender, and enhanced by so many considerations. "Take now this thy son," — and whither? — "into the land of Moriah;" which was three days' journey off; a circumstance, which, by prolonging the trial, would exceedingly aggravate it; and "offer him there

for a burnt-offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell of." Offer him there for a burnt-offering. This thine only, thy dear, thy beloved son, take him, and with thine own hand slay him, and burn his body with fire upon an altar. Such was the command. And now, from this view of the case, what appears to have been the *nature* of the trial to which Abraham was thus subjected? We should perhaps say that it was a trial of his obedience. He was called upon to show how far he was ready to go in obeying the divine command: whether he was willing to do violence to the strongest feelings of his nature; and to give up the object, which lay nearest to his heart, in compliance with the will of God. And doubtless in this view, the trial would be one of peculiar magnitude; and one, which would have put the piety and submission of the Patriarch to a very decisive proof.

But such, my brethren, does not appear, on further examination, to have been the *specific* nature of this trial; a closer inspection of the circumstances will show that it was Abraham's *faith*, which on this occasion was more immediately tried. So far, indeed, as faith is the root of all obedience, every command which tries our obedience, may in this sense be said to try our faith also. But still there are some trials, which more directly

assault the principle itself; and in a peculiar manner try the sincerity and strength of our faith. And such, as I will endeavour to show, was the trial under consideration. St. Paul in the text expressly tells us, that it was "*by faith* that Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." He adduces the Patriarch's conduct in this transaction as an instance of the power and triumph *of faith*, and hereby intimates, that it was in respect to *his faith*, that the chief part of this trial lay. Let us look more attentively into the circumstances of the case.

Isaac was the child of promise: by which expression, I mean, that he was not only the child given to Abraham by promise; but the child in whom the promises given to Abraham were centred. God had expressly promised to Abraham, that his name should be great upon earth; that his seed should surpass the stars of heaven in number; and that in him all the families of the earth should be blessed. But He had also no less expressly limited these promises to Isaac, and to *his* posterity, saying to Abraham, as we read in the text, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." And again, in another place, even before Isaac was born, God had said to Abraham, "Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with

him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." In consequence of these promises, and in full dependence on them, Abraham would have been accustomed to regard Isaac, from the hour of his birth, as the depositary of the divine purposes; and to consider the continuance of his life as essentially connected with the fulfilment of them. It would be a truth deeply and indelibly fixed in his mind, that if Isaac should die childless, the promises and purposes of God could never be accomplished.

Such then was the state of things, when he received the extraordinary command under review, to put Isaac to death, and to be himself the executioner of this unnatural act; an act, which directly tended in appearance to defeat all the intentions of God, and to falsify all His promises. If Isaac be put to death, how will the purposes of God stand; how will His word be fulfilled? Such was the suggestion, which would naturally present itself to Abraham's mind at this juncture: a suggestion, to which, if his faith and piety had been less, he would probably have yielded; and have justified his disobedience to the divine command, on the ground that a compliance with it would counteract and frustrate the divine purpose. But Abraham knew, as all the true servants of God know, that the precept, and not the purpose of God

was to be the rule of his conduct. It was not what the Lord might design in His counsels to accomplish, but what He had commanded his servant *to do*, which was to direct and regulate his proceeding. As the command, therefore, was plain and positive, he hesitates not to obey. He sets himself at once, without delay, to perform the dreadful task assigned to him. He "rose up early in the morning and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him."

But are we to suppose that Abraham, in thus preparing to execute the divine command, relinquished his hope in the promises of God, and no longer expected the divine purposes to be accomplished? No; we can suppose nothing of this kind: for in fact we are expressly told in the text, that "*by faith* Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac." He entered on the work assigned to him, and proceeded to the very last stage of it, in the full and firm persuasion, that notwithstanding seeming impediments, the counsel of the Lord would stand. He believed, though Isaac should be slain and consumed upon the altar, yet that the promises of God would still be fulfilled in Him. And how did he believe that this fulfilment would

be accomplished? By Isaac's being restored to life by the power of God. As we read in the text, "He that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son; of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; *accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead.*"

And here then we may begin more distinctly to perceive the nature of this trial, which Abraham was called to encounter. It was a trial of his faith, in the power and truth of God. It was a conflict with unbelief, aided by the strongest suggestions of natural affection. Abraham believed that God would raise up Isaac from the dead, and restore him, when slain, to life. And he believed that this event would certainly take place, because otherwise the promises of God could not be fulfilled, nor consequently His truth be confirmed. But, observe, how many things Unbelief would have to urge against this conclusion. It would suggest to Abraham's mind, 'Was 'there ever an instance of God's having 'raised up any person from the dead? Are 'you sure that He is able to raise the dead? 'Did He raise up righteous Abel from the 'dead, whom his brother had unjustly and 'impiously killed? Has He given you any 'assurance that He will raise up Isaac from 'the dead? And if after all you should be 'deceived in your hope, what a dreadful 'thing will it be to be deprived of your dear

'and only son, and by a death so cruel and 'unnatural!'

But to these suggestions of unbelief, Faith would reply, by saying, 'It is true; there 'has been no instance of a resurrection from 'the dead: but with God all things are pos- 'sible. He, who at first made man out of 'the dust of the earth, and breathed into him 'the breath of life—He can doubtless revive 'him when dead, and cause him to live again. 'I distrust not for a moment His almighty 'power. And shall I distrust His faithful- 'ness and truth? Has He not promised to 'me that in Isaac shall my seed be called? 'And shall this promise fail? If at his com- 'mand I slay my son, on whose life this pro- 'mise depends, then doubtless He will raise 'him again to life, and will give him back to 'me from the dead; as He at first gave him 'to me according to His word, by an effort 'of His almighty power. Though I put him 'to death, I shall not lose him: for so surely 'as the Lord, whom I serve, is able to do all 'things, and is true and faithful to His word; 'so surely will Isaac be restored to me, and 'all the promises in him be accomplished.' Such, we may suppose, was the conflict in Abraham's heart; faith struggling with un- belief; faith strengthening him in His holy purpose, by setting before him the perfections and attributes of God; and by leading him

throughout the lengthened trial to wrestle with God in prayer, and "against hope to believe in hope." Such, I say, was the inward conflict of this holy man: while journeying towards the destined spot, he would observe an outward composure, nor betray to his companions by his countenance the arduous struggle, which was taking place in his soul. At length "on the third day he lift up his eyes, and saw the place afar off." And now the triumph of faith disclosed itself. The very language in which he addresses the young men who accompanied him, shows at once his purpose and his expectation. "Abide you here with the ass: and I and the lad will go yonder and worship; and will come again to you." From Isaac himself he anticipated no opposition to his purpose. His habitual piety would dispose him, as the event showed, to yield a ready submission to the divine will. But from his servants, Abraham might expect a different conduct. It was most probable that *they* would strongly remonstrate against his design, when they should be acquainted with it, and see him prepared to execute it; and, perhaps, would interfere to prevent its accomplishment. He, therefore, said to them, "Abide you here with the ass: and I and the lad will go yonder and worship." This language shows that his mind was fully made up to the crisis. Had he been looking round for

any way of escape from the duty imposed on him, he would have taken his attendants with him, in the secret hope that they might interpose and defeat his attempt. But he had no such thought. His purpose was implicitly to follow the divine direction: and therefore he said, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship;" to which he adds, "*and we will come again to you:*" now what did he mean by this assertion? Was it said without any meaning, or with a view to deceive his attendants? Did he tell them, that "he and the lad would come again to them," when he knew that he had no intention of bringing back Isaac with him? This would have been a gratuitous, an unnecessary falsehood; of which we cannot suppose the Patriarch to have been guilty, especially in his present state of feeling. Did he use these words then without any meaning at all? No: they were doubtless spoken in sincerity; they were words of soberness and truth. They were the language of *faith*. They were spoken in a full and firm belief of Isaac's immediate restoration to life; and thus showed that his expectation was founded on the power and faithfulness of God. He "accounted that as God was able to raise him up, even from the dead," so in fulfilment of the promises given in him, he certainly would thus raise him up.

Such, then, was Abraham's faith. Under

the influence of it, he persevered to the very last moment of this arduous trial: till having bound his son upon the altar, and taken the knife into his hand to slay him, the Lord by His angel suddenly stayed the proceeding; and spared to the father's feelings the painful operation assigned to them. *In his mind* he had already accomplished the sacrifice; and the Lord was pleased to accept the will for the deed. Satisfied with this proof of His obedience and of the exalted principle from which it sprung, He bade him not to lay his hand upon his son, nor do any thing unto him: whom thus devoted to death, the Patriarch "received from the dead, as in a figure:" and with whom he returned in company to his servants, as in faith he had said unto them.

From the subject thus explained, I will now proceed to deduce some instructive observations.

1. We here see the true nature of faith; that divine principle in the heart, the effect of regenerating grace, of which the importance and excellency are so extolled in Scripture. We see that it consists in a firm dependence on the word of God, and in a full assurance of its being fulfilled; *because it is the word of Him*, who is able to fulfil it, and who is truth itself. Faith builds upon the perfections of God. It looks to Him, whose

glorious attributes are all pledged to make good His promises: and consequently it is not to be discouraged by opposing difficulties, or even apparent impossibilities. Our Saviour, speaking of this divine principle, says, "Verily I say unto you, if ye have faith and doubt not, ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and it shall be done:" which is nothing more than a parabolical or figurative way of saying, that faith will surmount all interposing obstacles; and that, while it looks at the power and faithfulness of God to perform his words, every thing which might seem to prevent the performance sinks in its estimation into nothing. What mountains of difficulty, as it has been already suggested, would unbelief raise in Abraham's case! But faith removed them all. He saw no real difficulty where the Almighty was concerned. He knew that nothing was impossible to *Him*. He knew that *He* could not deceive or lie. Therefore he "staggered not at the promise through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God." Such then is faith. It may vary indeed in its degree: it may not at all times be equally in exercise: it may be weak or strong, it may be little or great, but still in *nature* it is always the same; the same powerful principle, acting from the same causes, and tending to the same results.

2. We may observe, that if such be the principle of faith, it is no wonder if its operations be mistaken by those who have it not. The conduct, the language, the sentiments of such as live under the influence of this principle, must oftentimes appear strange, and utterly inexplicable, to one who is destitute of it. What can the latter know of the motives and the objects of the former? He can know nothing of them. How then can he understand and approve the proceedings which result from them? He cannot understand them. Hence it is that religion is so frequently accounted folly and madness by worldly and ungodly people. Nor in the present state of things can it be otherwise. Would not persons, who were unacquainted with Abraham's principle of action, have accounted him mad for going about to slay his son, in the belief that God would raise him up again? And yet we have seen that he had solid and substantial grounds for his conduct. Is it not more than probable that Noah was derided, and esteemed a fool by the generation among whom he lived, for spending year after year of his life in building an ark to save himself and his family from perishing in a flood; of which there never had been an instance; of which there was no sign, and to all appearance no probability? And yet he had good reasons for his conduct.

He acted in faith on the word of God, which those around him knew not how to appreciate; which they did not believe nor regard. The same remark may be applied to Moses. When he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God;" would he not be reckoned little better than a fool or a madman, by those, who did not see, as he saw, Him that was invisible to any eye but that of faith; and who had not respect, as he had, to the recompense of reward? My brethren, are you walking by faith? Are you living in a dependence on the word of God, believing its promises and obeying its commands? Then, be not surprised, as though some strange thing had happened unto you, if *your* motives should be mistaken, and *your* conduct misrepresented by the world in which you are living. Be not surprised, if you should be accounted fools for Christ's sake. You will be only treated, as He himself and His Apostles have been treated before you. Only beware that you give not any just occasion to those who are disposed to speak evil of you. If you are deservedly reproached for your own indiscretions, extravagancies, and follies, lay not these reproaches to your religion; say not that you are suffering for righteousness' sake. Do not needlessly give offence. Do not

foolishly affect singularity, nor court opposition. This is no part of religion. Go on humbly in the way of duty: and while you are not so influenced by the sneers or censures of the world, as to be turned away from the right path; let your light at the same time "so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven."

3. I would observe, that if God hath given to you this precious faith, of which we have been discoursing, He will most probably put it to trial. He tried Abraham's faith, and He will try your faith. He will try it for His own sake, and for your sake also. He will call this principle into exercise, for His own glory and for your profit. Its power and strength and excellence would not be understood and known, unless it should be brought into action; nor would you make equal advances in the divine life, nor share so much of the consolations and joys of true religion. The more Abraham's faith was tried, the more he rejoiced in God, and the richer blessings he received from Him: and severe as this trial doubtless was, yet he found in the end that it yielded the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Be not then discouraged, if the Lord in His providence should try your faith, and call this heavenly principle into

exercise. Difficulties and afflictions are the means which He employs for this purpose. If He calls you as He did Abraham, to painful duties and sacrifices, it is not because He is displeased with you, but because, in *His own way*, He would do you good in the latter end. And if therefore "for a season you may be in heaviness through manifold temptations," bear in mind that there is "a need" for it. Remember, that it is for "the trial of your faith, which is much more precious than of gold that perisheth; that though it be tried with fire, it may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

SERMON XIII.

DESCRIPTION AND DANGER OF RELIGIOUS SELF-CONCEIT.

PROVERBS, XXVI. 12.

Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him.

THE Proverbs of Solomon are full of wisdom. They abound with worldly wisdom, but much more with that which is heavenly. Many of the maxims, contained in this book, are true and useful in a moral sense: but they are much more profitable in a religious sense. And we shall miss very much of the instruction intended to be conveyed in them, if confining our interpretation to their moral meaning, we overlook their spiritual application. This remark holds good with respect to the statement in the text. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him." We all feel the truth and force of this statement in respect to worldly things. We know that

there is nothing which renders a man, in the common concerns of life, so unmanageable as self-conceit. In any transaction we should have more hope of success in having to deal with a man, who though of moderate, and even inferior qualifications, should think lowly of himself, than with one of high attainments, who should be puffed up with conceited notions of his own wisdom and excellence. But while we put this interpretation on the text, if we stop here, and look no further into its meaning, we shall fall very short of the instructive lesson which it is designed to teach us, and of the spiritual benefit which we may derive from it.

It shall be my endeavour, then, in this discourse, to open to you the religious meaning of this passage, and to show you how true and just is its application in a spiritual sense.

With this view I shall proceed,

I. To explain the Statement in the text, and

II. To show the Grounds and Reasons of it.

Let us humbly pray, that the same Spirit of truth and holiness, which has caused this passage to be written for our instruction, will enable us to understand it, and to profit by it.

I. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him."

In the language of Scripture generally, and of this book in particular, wisdom is another name for religion. So that all which is here said of the excellency of wisdom, is in fact spoken of religion. The wise man is the religious man: while on the other hand, as foolishness is irreligion, so the fool is the irreligious man. It is the *fool* who hath said in his heart, "There is no God." None are so wise as those who fear, obey, and love God, and none are more foolish than those who despise, offend, and disobey Him. According then to this view, the man who in the text is said to be "wise in his own conceit," is the man who is *religious* in his own conceit; the man who is satisfied with his own religious knowledge, proficiency, and attainments, and on this account is proud and lifted up, and thinks highly of himself. "Seest thou, then," asks Solomon in the text, "seest thou a man" of this description? Alas! my brethren, I wish we had not cause for saying that we see too many characters of this kind in the world; I wish there was not reason to fear that such characters abound among us, far more than at first sight we might suspect. In order to point them out, I will endeavour somewhat more particularly to describe them; not for the purpose, however, of pointing them out to others, but with the hope of pointing them out to themselves.

Let me request you to turn your eyes inward; and while I endeavour to draw the character mentioned in the text, see whether you can discover the traces and lineaments of it in your own state and experience.

All men are naturally subject to pride and vanity; prone to think highly of themselves, because of some little distinctions which they may have, or may fancy that they have, above others; and there is no reason why a supposed superiority in religion should not furnish ground for the exercise of this disposition as readily as any other fancied distinction. One person is vain of his strength, another of his beauty; one of his understanding, and another of his wit; one of his wealth, and another of his family. And what forbids, then, that a man should be vain of his religion? What forbids, that thinking himself better than others, and on that account a greater favourite of Heaven, he should be lifted up in his heart, and be filled with self-conceit? Take notice, my brethren, it is not the tendency of religion to make men thus vain and self-conceited. No: its real tendency is directly the contrary; its real tendency is to correct these evils, and to inculcate and produce the very opposite graces of humility and lowliness of mind. But corrupt nature will abuse and pervert every

thing; it will turn food into poison, and extract bitter from every sweet. We are therefore not to wonder if men, in their natural unrenewed state, should so mistake the nature of religion as to become proud of that acquisition which, if really attained, ought to make them humble; and to be self-conceited in that very particular in which, of all others, they ought to be most self-abased. But more clearly to describe the character in question, I will specify, first, some few things which they probably may have; and, secondly, some few things which they certainly have *not*.

1. They probably may have *knowledge*: — not a deep and extensive knowledge, on religious subjects; but a certain superficial and scanty knowledge: such a knowledge as enables them to see that they know something more of religion than they once knew, and something more of it than many others around them know; such a knowledge as enables them to talk about religion, and to make an appearance of being wiser and more knowing than others.

They probably also may have *feeling* on religious matters. Their affections may have been warmed; their passions may have been roused. In this respect, they may have "tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come;" their fears and their hopes may have been strongly

excited; they may have embraced with joy the promises of the Gospel, and may have eagerly applied to themselves the comforts and blessings of it.

They may probably also have what they call *religious attainments;* they may possess some natural talents and abilities, which their religious knowledge and their religious feelings may have called forth into new exercise; or to which, by these means, a new turn and direction may have been given. A freedom of speech, and a fluency in discourse, a constitutional boldness in avowing their opinions and a natural pertinacity in maintaining them, are now employed in the service or on the subject of religion, and are considered by the persons in question, however mistaken they may be in their notions, as religious attainments, and proofs of a religious state.

But on the other hand, while they probably may have these things of which I have been speaking; yet,

2. There are some things which they certainly *have* not.

First, with all their knowledge about religion, they are destitute of that knowledge, which in religion is of the utmost consequence to us: namely, *self-knowledge.* They know not themselves. They know not their actual state before God. They know not

their own heart. They have never seen themselves as they are drawn and represented in the word of God; or, if at any time they may have had some view of this kind, it has been transient and momentary. As St. James says, they "have been like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." So it is with the persons whom I am describing. They have no deep, abiding, permanent convictions of their real state and character. And hence it is, that with the Laodiceans, "they say that they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and know not that they are wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

Again, as a necessary consequence of this want of self-knowledge, they have, secondly, no real *humiliation of heart.* They may have had religious feelings: but they have had no deep and humbling impressions of the depravity and corruptions of their nature. They may have trembled before God under a sense of their sins, as Felix trembled when the Apostle "reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgement to come;" but they have never felt themselves, with Job, "*to be vile;*" they have never "*abhorred themselves.*" They have no sensible, lively

apprehension of their impurity and uncleanness in the sight of a holy God. They are not experimentally acquainted with the secret inward workings of corruption; nor know what it is to struggle against the motions of the flesh, and with that law of sin which continually wars against the renewed mind. Hence it is, that these persons, while they profess themselves to be serious, yet often talk and act as if in their own ideas they had little or no sin remaining in them.

Further, while they are proud of their attainments, they are, thirdly, greatly wanting in *charity*, as to their judgement of the religious state and character of others. This, indeed, is an unavoidable consequence of their self-conceit and vanity; having high thoughts of themselves, they look down upon others, and give no persons credit for any real religion, at least for any large measure of it, but those who are of their own sect and party: or who subscribe to the opinion which they have of themselves. It was thus that the Pharisees of old were described. They were persons who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, *and despised others;*" and in that representation which our Saviour gave in the parable of a person of this character, He describes him as going up to the temple to offer his devotions to God: and there superciliously thanking Him that he

was not as other men were, and especially *like the poor publican*, whom he saw standing at a distance, and in his heart despised.

After this view of the persons in question, it may perhaps be unnecessary to say much respecting their conduct. Filled with conceited notions of their own knowledge, feelings, and attainments; ignorant of themselves; unhumbled in their hearts, and uncharitable in their judgement of others; it must be evident, that they have in their mind but a very defective standard of moral duty, and will be satisfied with a very low measure of moral practice. It is plain, from the view which has been already given of them, that they have no notion of rendering to God a *spiritual* service; for with such self-conceit, and want of real humility, they are themselves only carnally minded, and consequently can render only a carnal service. So long as they are lifted up with pride, it is impossible that they can be spiritually minded, and can serve God in the spirit.

Such, then, are the persons described in the text. What is the statement made respecting them? "Seest thou a man thus wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him." By a *fool*, as we have already seen, is here meant an irreligious, ungodly man; a person who, living a careless, worldly, and profane life, makes no pre-

tensions to religion, and gives himself no thought about it. Such a man, it must be allowed, is, with respect to his soul, in a very dangerous state. There is a possibility, indeed, of his being ultimately saved; but there is at present but little probability of such an event. Only a very slender hope can be entertained of his spiritual recovery and salvation. Bad, however, as is the state of such a man, it is better than that of the persons of whom we have been speaking; it is, on the whole, a less dangerous state. Speaking after the manner of men, and according to the common order of the Divine proceedings, there is more hope of the irreligious and careless sinner, than of those who are religious in their own conceit. If the former be far off from the kingdom of God, the latter are yet farther from it. Of the two, they are in the more hopeless condition. Does this statement seem strange? Do we find difficulty in believing it? Let us remember that our Saviour has Himself stated the same thing. Speaking to the Pharisees, He said, "Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you:" while experience constantly shows the truth of this statement. The minister of the Gospel uniformly finds, that there are no characters in his congregations in general in a more hopeless state,

than such as are filled with a conceit of their own religious attainments. He finds by experience, that of all his hearers they are the most impracticable; and that while many a poor sinner whom they despise, repents and believes the Gospel, *they* continue in a proud, unhumbled state, and often in the end turn away from the holy commandment, and deny the very faith which they have confidently and presumptuously professed.

Having thus explained the Statement in the text, I proceed,

II. To show the Grounds and Reasons of it.

In the first place, the persons of whom we have been speaking totally mistake the *nature* of true religion. True religion consists in "doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God." *To be religious* is to be spiritually-minded; to be renewed day by day to the image of Christ in righteousness and true holiness. To *advance* in religion is to grow in grace; in bringing forth the fruits of the Spirit, which are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: while the greater advancement a person really makes in true religion, the greater reason he sees to think meanly of himself, and charitably of others. But how totally opposite to all these views are the notions which the persons de-

scribed in the text entertain of religion! They suppose that it consists in knowledge, and feelings, and gifts; and the more they have of these things, the more rapidly, as they think, they are advancing in religion. Not aware that "knowledge puffeth up, but that charity edifieth," they presume on the little which they know; and imagine that the more confidence they have in their own attainments, the higher they are rising in the kingdom of God. But while such are their views of religion; while they thus mistake its very nature, and at the same time suppose that they are better acquainted with it than others are, where is the probability of reclaiming them? What prospect is there of leading *them* right, whose minds are thus pre-occupied and filled with error? Surely there must be more hope of one who is at present a stranger to any religion, than of those who thus mistake its nature, and then are proud of their mistake. But,

In the second place, another disadvantage under which such persons labour, is that they actually pervert the very *design* and *end* of religion. They make a use of it the very reverse of that which it is intended they should make of it. Religion is designed to make men humble; but it makes these persons proud. It is designed to bring men down in their own opinion, — to lead them

to think lowly of themselves and highly of others; but in these persons its effect is directly the reverse. It fills them with self-conceit, and high notions of themselves, and teaches them to look down upon, and to despise others. Let it be admitted that they may have knowledge and attainments; yet ought these things to lift them up, and not dispose them to humility and charity? Have they any thing but what they have received? If they differ from others, have they made themselves to differ? Have they any ground for boasting? No. The consciousness of their own insufficiency and demerit, and a sense of the mercies which they have received, ought to bring down every high thought, to lay them low in the dust, and to inspire them with tender pity and compassion for those that are out of the way. But we have seen that the contrary is the fact. Religious in their own conceit, they think themselves something, and pride themselves over others; and what hope can there be of their becoming better? Surely the man of no religion is a more likely person to profit by the ministry of the word, than those who thus abuse and pervert it. And this leads me to mention one other Reason for the Statement in the text; namely,

Thirdly, that the persons of whom we are speaking have closed up the door to their

own improvement and their real conversion to God. Real conversion to God must result from such a conviction of personal guilt and impurity as will lead to real self-abhorrence and humiliation of heart. No man will truly turn to God till he is first brought to condemn and renounce himself. Till he feels himself to be nothing, his own righteousness as an unclean thing, and his own heart as "deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," he will never really understand the salvation of the Gospel; nor without this preparation of heart will he be able to walk with God in that humble and dependant spirit which Christianity requires. But how are the persons of whom the text speaks, to obtain this preparation of heart? How are they who are puffed up with self-conceit to humble and abase themselves? By what means, by what process are they to be brought to receive the truth like a little child, in simplicity and teachableness of mind? The preaching of the word, and the convictions of sin produced by it, are the great instruments which God usually employs for humbling the sinner and for leading him to abhor himself. But against this weapon the persons in question have already made themselves proof. In their own opinion they are already wiser than their teachers: and what hope then is there of their listening to

their instructions? How shall *they* be persuaded to abase themselves as sinners, who esteem themselves righteous? How shall *they* be convinced of sin, who think that their hearts are already sufficiently good? Surely there is more hope of the openly irreligious man than of such persons: for he has evidently fewer obstacles in the way of his conversion; he is more open to conviction, and, consequently (to speak after the manner of men), nearer, in our apprehension, than they are to the kingdom of heaven.

In briefly applying this subject, I would observe to you, my brethren, that we have here a test by which we may try the pretensions of every doctrine, and every system of religion, which professes to come from God. St. John says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit; but try the spirits whether they are of God:" and here then is one test by which we may try them. Are you told that such or such a doctrine is the doctrine of Scripture? Observe what is its tendency; what is the fruit which it naturally produces? Does it tend to make men proud, to fill them with self-conceit; to lift them up with high notions of themselves; to take them out of their proper sphere, and line of duty; to lead them to think that they are wiser or better than others; and on this account to look down upon them, with contempt and a self-righteous

spirit; and to say, as it were, to them, "Stand by thyself; I am holier than thou?" If such be the natural and obvious tendency of any doctrine, professing to come from God, and to be revealed and taught by His Spirit, we may be sure that it has really no just pretensions of this kind. Such a doctrine comes from man, and not from God. It is a human invention, agreeable and subservient to the corruptions of man's heart; and not a divine revelation intended to oppose and subdue them. Let us receive no doctrine as from God, but such as tends to produce and increase real and genuine humility of heart and spirit. One great design of the Gospel is to bring down and lay low our natural pride: and consequently whatever tends to feed and foster this evil disposition, so far from being a doctrine of the Gospel, most evidently opposes and counteracts it.

In the next place, my brethren, let us use this subject for self-examination. Let us by it try our own religion, and see what is our own spiritual state. You must be aware that this is not, or at least ought not to be, a matter of slight importance with us. Let us, then, put to ourselves the following questions: — Does that, which we call our religion, make us self-conceited? Does it lead us to think ourselves something? Does it induce us to esteem ourselves righteous, and to despise

others? Let us recollect, if this be the case with us, *whom* we resemble, namely, those Pharisees of old, of whom our Lord spake such severe things, and on whom He denounced such heavy judgements. Let us bear in mind, if such be our religion, that the text declares, that there is more hope of a fool, of the profane, worldly, careless sinner, than of us. Surely, this state must be a very aweful one: to flatter and persuade ourselves that we are high in the kingdom of God, when, in fact, we "have neither part nor lot in the matter;" and are further off from it, and in a less hopeful state, than the very persons whom we account the irreligious and ungodly! Let us examine ourselves, my brethren, and see that we are not thus miserably deceiving ourselves, and crying peace, peace, where God has said there is no peace.

And what shall we say to those ungodly and profane persons, of whom we are speaking? Think not, because we have said, that there may be, humanly speaking, more hope of you than of some who make a pretension to religion, that, therefore, you have any reason to be glad. *They* may be farther off than you; but *you* are so far off, that continuing as you are, it is impossible but that you must perish. It is not meant by the comparative way of speaking in the text, to

give you any encouragement; or to lead you to suppose that in your present state there is, or can be, any hope at all for you. So long as you are living without God in the world, leading a careless, and a wicked life, you are in the broad way of destruction. You are a worker of iniquity; and as such, you must have your portion with the workers of iniquity. There is but one thing which can save either you, or the self-conceited professor of religion from everlasting ruin; and that is, a *true conversion of heart to God.* "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." The proud Pharisee and the profane sinner, must each of them be born again before they can enter into the kingdom of God. They both must experience the power of converting grace in their souls; or otherwise they must be for ever shut out from the glory of heaven. If the *one* must be made holy, the *other* must be made humble: for pride and unholiness are alike incompatible with salvation. — My brethren, let us all profit by these remarks. Let us seek of Jesus Christ, His pardoning and converting grace. Nor let us desist from seeking, till we have found: till we have experienced in our soul the real power of converting grace, a new heart, and a new spirit; till we are made new creatures in Him; and with the humility, simplicity, and teachableness of children, we esteem others

better than ourselves, and thoroughly renounce our own righteousness. Let us come to the cross of Jesus; there let us learn a lesson of real condescension and humiliation of heart: there let us contemplate the penalty which our sins have merited; till covered with shame and penetrated with grief, we abhor ourselves; till repenting in dust and ashes, we smite upon our breasts and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner."

SERMON XIV.

GENUINE CONVERSION ILLUSTRATED IN THE CASE OF ZACCHEUS.

LUKE, xix. 8.

And Zaccheus stood and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him four-fold.

THE Scriptures expressly declare, and reason and experience shew how true the declaration is, that religion begins in a change of heart: and that till this spiritual change takes place, there is and there can be no real religion in man. In his heart and disposition he is naturally turned from God, and walks in his own ways, which are those of sin and of the world. Consequently, before he can walk with God, and have pleasure in His ways, he must be changed in his heart and dispositions:

he must be turned from sin to holiness, from the power of Satan unto God.

It is this spiritual change, which is signified by the word *conversion*. Conversion is the turning point in a man's spiritual state, and the necessity of it in order to his salvation is expressly stated by Christ Himself; "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven:" and virtually by St. Paul, when he said to the Jews, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." But if such be the necessity of this spiritual change; if a man "*must* thus be born again before he can see the kingdom of God"—then an important question arises; namely, How can we know when this change has taken place in a person? How can we tell whether he is converted or not? In other words, what are the marks and proofs of a true conversion?

On this point there have been among men a great difference and variety of views and statements. Some have set the marks too high, and others too low. Some have been merely formal, others have been enthusiastical in their notions on this subject. Some have made the evidences of conversion to consist in a certain set of frames and feelings, or in the possession and exercise of certain supposed spiritual gifts: others in the

holding of a certain set of opinions, or in joining a certain sect or party in religion. But in all these statements one thing seems to be forgotten; what saith the Scripture? To the law and to the testimony. Are these alleged marks of conversion, *scriptural* marks? Are they such as the Word of God lays down and requires?

It must be perfectly clear, that the scriptural marks are those to which alone any attention is to be paid; and that if the same Divine Word, which insists on the necessity of conversion, points out also the kind of evidence by which its reality is to be proved, we must look for *such* evidence in proof of the change in question, and not rest satisfied of the reality of the one till we are convinced of the existence of the other.

Of what kind then is the evidence for which the Scriptures teach us to look in proof of a converted state? It is of a *practical* kind. The change is an *inward* change, the process and operation of which no one can see. But the effects, which it produces, very many of them at least, are *outward*, which *can* be seen; and from which, therefore, the reality of the inward change may be inferred. "By their fruits ye shall know them," is the mark which our Saviour Himself lays down upon this subject. The fruit shews the nature of the tree; and from the

quality of the former we judge with certainty of the state of the latter, whether it be good or corrupt. Here, then, we have a *scriptural* mark of true conversion. Do we wish to know whether a man is truly converted? Let us not ask what may be his frames or his feelings, his gifts or his opinions, his party or his sect; but let us ask, what is his conduct? What are the fruits of his conversion? How does the supposed inward change influence his outward practice? He professes to be a new man within, is he one *without* also? "He that doeth righteousness, is righteous:" while "he that committeth sin is of the Devil." What a man says or thinks, or professes, or feels, does not prove him to be a converted man: for after all he may be either deceived or an impostor. But what is now his manner of life and conversation? What are now his tempers and dispositions, his resolutions and purposes, his aims and desires, his proceedings and practices? Are these, so far as they were evil, changed and improved? Does he shew in these respects that he is a new creature, that old things are passed away, and that all things are become new?

We find in the text, and in the passage connected with it, a striking instance of the truth of these remarks, and a clear illustration of them. We have in the passage a

general account of the conversion of Zaccheus; while the text sets before us the *particular proof* which he gave of the reality and extent of the change which had been inwardly wrought in him. And in discoursing on the subject, I will follow the division thus suggested, with humble prayer to God, that He may make the consideration of it profitable to us.

I. Let us advert to the general account given us in the passage connected with the text, of the conversion of Zaccheus.

We are told of this man that he "was the chief among the publicans, and was rich." The publicans were the collectors of the taxes imposed on the Jews by the Roman government; an office which, in itself, made them peculiarly odious to the people; but in their discharge of which they greatly increased the odium by their injustice and extortion: and accordingly hence it was that we so often find the expression "publicans and sinners" used in Scripture, as descriptive of the same kind of characters.

The conversion, then, of some persons of this description was a suitable display of the power of divine grace, and clearly and aptly exhibited the merciful design of Him, who "was come into the world to seek and to save that which was lost." Accordingly, one of the Apostles themselves, St. Matthew, had

been a person of this description. He was a publican; and was actually sitting at the receipt of custom, when Jesus said unto him, "Follow me:" and such a divine power accompanied the call, that he immediately arose and followed Him. Renouncing at once his profitable business, and unlawful gains, he took up his cross and followed Christ. Here was the triumph of divine grace, "converting the soul," and changing the conduct of this publican and sinner.

Such also was the case in the instance now before us. Zaccheus was a person of the office and character here described. He was not only a publican, but the chief among the publicans, and probably derived from his office a considerable profit; for it is added, "and he was rich."

Such was the person, who hearing that Jesus was about to pass along the way, had a great desire to see Him. His motive was probably simple curiosity; a natural wish to see a person, of whose works and miracles the report had doubtless reached him; and especially of his having just restored a blind man to sight in the neighbourhood of Jericho, from which place He was now coming out. But a large concourse of people, whose admiration had been excited by this same miracle, following and surrounding Jesus as he walked, Zaccheus, being little of stature, could not

gratify his wish; he "could not see Him for the press." Hastening, therefore, forward, nay, as it is said, even "running before" on the road where Jesus was passing, he climbed up into a sycamore-tree, which stood by the way-side, that so he might the better indulge his curiosity, and obtain a full and distinct view of this extraordinary person, whom he so much wished to see. Little did he think of the grace and mercy which there awaited him! Little did he suspect, while he was running and climbing up into the tree, what a momentous change he was about to undergo; what an alteration he was about to experience in his principles, dispositions, and prospects! My brethren, what a blessing it may prove to be in the way along which Christ is passing! What a blessing it may prove to be led, from whatever cause, into the House of God; where Christ is especially present, His word is preached, and His Spirit is poured out! How often has it happened, that when no better a motive than curiosity has brought a man to church, he has there received the word with power, and has been made a monument of grace and mercy! And with what reason, then, do we urge you all for your own sakes, to be frequent and regular in your attendance on divine ordinances, in the hope that *you* also "may be partakers of the benefit." O that the

Lord may cause His voice to be so effectually heard in this His house of prayer, that even those who have hitherto been most deaf to His gracious call, may hear it, and may be brought to the obedience of faith! Thus it was with Zaccheus. "For when Jesus came to the place where he was, He looked up and saw him, and said unto him, Zaccheus, make haste and come down: for to-day I must abide at thy house." A divine influence accompanied the words; a divine illumination followed them. The heart of this publican felt, as that of Matthew had felt, the converting power of Christ's call. Little had he expected such a salutation. Little could he have supposed, that *he* should thus have been noticed and selected out of all the multitude in such a manner. But no sooner did he hear the words of Christ, than "he made haste, and came down, and received Him joyfully." Though we are not told the particulars which followed in our Lord's coming to the house of Zaccheus; yet we may reasonably conclude, that He proceeded to instruct him in the nature of spiritual religion, and to give him clearer views of that heavenly doctrine, as to its tendency and effects, which He was come to teach. The result was, that while the Scribes and Pharisees "were murmuring at his having gone to be guest with a man that was a sinner;" this sinner was imbibing heavenly

truth; was sitting an humble disciple at the feet of Jesus; and was undergoing in his heart that important spiritual change, which alone could fit him for the service of God; and of the reality and extent of which he at length gave the striking proof mentioned in the text. To this proof, then, as the other division of our subject, let us now advert.

II. Zaccheus, divinely taught and illuminated, born again of the Spirit, and become a new creature in Christ Jesus, thus testified the reality and extent of this inward change, by publicly declaring the present convictions and purposes of his heart. He "stood, and said unto the Lord, Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor: and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him four-fold."

Let us first observe the *kind* of evidence, which Zaccheus here produces in proof of his inward conversion. It was altogether sober and practical in its nature and tendency. He does not talk of his feelings and emotions. He spake only of the purposes and resolutions, which he had now formed as to his future conduct. He stated what he now intended, under the teaching and by the help of divine grace, hereafter *to do*; well knowing that *this* would be the best and surest evidence of his inward conversion, and of the spiritual peace and gratitude which he now

began to feel. By his fruits it should be seen and known that he "received with meekness the engrafted word," and was indeed become "a new creature in Christ Jesus."

What these fruits should be, he now declares. It was his determination from this time to give a portion of his goods to the poor; and wherever in past times he had done wrong to any man, to make him restitution. Justice and charity were the Christian virtues, which he purposed from this time to practise. Instructed by the doctrine of Christ, and the teaching of the Spirit, he now perceived what real religion was, and how clearly the prophet had described it, when he said, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of thee, but to do good justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Zaccheus, a sinner saved by grace, was now taught to walk humbly with his God; and being renewed in the spirit of his mind, he would henceforth delight in doing justice, and in shewing mercy. Take notice, that as true religion consists in walking humbly with God according to His will revealed in the Bible; so a true conversion of heart will be accompanied with a practical attention to the duties of justice and charity. And where these are neglected, it is idle for men to talk of being

religious. No apparent zeal for religion, no attendance on its ordinances, no approval of its doctrines, no profession of faith, no frames or feelings, can compensate for the want of these things. The man who is not habitually just in principle and conduct, and charitable according to his means, is not (whatever he may pretend to be) a *converted* person.

But while such was the *kind of evidence* which Zaccheus gave of his conversion; we may notice, in the next place, one of two particulars, which added greatly to the *strength* of it, and made it in his case decisive.

When he spake of his determination to be henceforth just and charitable, we must call to mind, what he had hitherto been in these respects. In all probability, and to all appearance, he had been unjust and uncharitable. Far from rendering to all their due, he had been in the habit of unjustly depriving men of their due. Like the other publicans, he had plundered people by false accusation; and, as he plainly intimated, had enriched himself by doing wrong to others. And it was not likely that money thus unjustly gotten should have been charitably spent. The same principle, which induced him to amass it by extortion and oppression, would lead him either to spend it on himself, or covetously to hoard it. When, therefore,

he now declared his resolution of making restitution for the wrongs he had done, and henceforth of dispersing liberally to the poor, he could not have given a stronger or more convincing proof of the reality of his inward change. Such fruit shewed indeed that the nature of the tree was decidedly altered and improved. Let us here, then, observe, that while true conversion influences and changes the whole man, it will particularly prove itself to be genuine by its effects on those parts of the character which have been most prominent and offensive. It is in subduing the sin which most easily besets us, that the power of divine grace will be most conspicuously seen. When the intemperate become sober; the licentious, chaste; the passionate, meek; the proud, humble; the extortioner, just; the covetous, liberal;—when such particular proofs of an inward change appear, they greatly strengthen the general testimony; and, unless contradicted by other evidence, decidedly shew the reality and extent of the inward change.

But again.—While Zaccheus gave thus additional proof of his conversion, he greatly strengthened it by another circumstance. He shewed, not only what the nature and quality of the fruit should be, but also in what abundance it should be produced. When the tree brings forth *good* fruit, we infer from it, that the

tree is *good;* but when this fruit is produced in *great abundance,* our conviction of the goodness of the tree is greatly strengthened and confirmed. What, then, did Zaccheus now state? Not merely that he would make restitution for the wrongs which he had done, but that he would *restore four-fold;* — not merely that he would henceforth be kind and charitable to the poor, but that he would *give to them one half of his goods.* Surely the change of principle and heart, which prompted such resolves, and dictated such a conduct, could not be doubtful. Here was a solid, a substantial evidence of real conversion. Could any feelings, any professions, have demonstrated in a manner equally convincing the reality and extent of the change which had taken place within? My brethren, be not deceived. As by the quality of the fruit the nature of the tree is shewn; so those who bear much fruit, render the greater glory to God: because they exhibit, in the least questionable manner, the power and efficacy of converting grace. It was when Zaccheus had given these marks and evidences of spiritual conversion, that "Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come unto this house: inasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham." According to the flesh he had before been a son of Abraham; but now, as it was evident, he was become one of his spiritual children;

a partaker of Abraham's faith and holiness. Born again of the Spirit of God, and bearing the fruits of the Spirit, he was now most clearly, "an Israelite indeed;" a real convert to true religion; and consequently a monument of the power and grace of Him, who, as "the Son of Man, was come to seek and to save that which was lost."

In an application of this subject to ourselves, let me urge you, my brethren, while you admit, according to the plain doctrine of Scripture, the necessity of a conversion of heart, to look for the *proof* of it in those clear and distinctive evidences, which the Scriptures point out as descriptive and decisive on the subject. Look to these, if you wish to know your real character, and to learn whether you are truly converted or not. For instance, what is your conduct with respect to the goods and possessions of this world? Whatever you may have once been, yet are you now no longer *immoderate* in the pursuit, and *selfish* and *covetous* in the use of them? Since you have professed to be governed by Christian hopes and principles, have you desisted from every thing like fraud and injustice in your dealings with others, not over-reaching them in any transaction, nor attempting to benefit yourself by doing them wrong? Are you guilty of no injustice or oppression in any thing that you do? Are you conscientious, for instance, in discharging

your debt to the state, not avoiding your share of the public burdens, by evading the taxes, or by selling and buying smuggled and contraband goods? For remember, that if in the case of Zaccheus it was a proof of his original *want* of religion,, that he exacted from the people more than he ought to have done, it would have been no less a mark of *their* irreligious state to have attempted to pay less than was justly demanded of them. — Again, have you already defrauded any one? Have you secretly or openly done injury to them in their property or their character? Does your conscience charge you with any sin of this kind, committed ever so long ago? If you are a true convert to Christianity, you will endeavour, after your power, to make restitution for the wrong which you have done. You will do what you can to repair the injury; and to make amends to the party wronged. Now, is this the case? Do you thus prove the reality of the change which you profess to have experienced? — Further, in your *use* of your worldly goods, be they more or less, are you *liberal* after your power? Real Christianity softens and opens the heart; frees it from selfish and covetous feelings; and makes a man generous and charitable, as well as honest and just. Have you this proof of being a real Christian? Whatever you may

have once been, yet are you now, not close and covetous, not selfish and hard hearted? Your means of doing good and of shewing mercy may be few; but do you cheerfully employ these few, and improve them as a talent committed to your trust? Once more, does the reality of your conversion shew itself especially in having turned you from those sins, to which you were previously most addicted; and in leading you to the exercise of those virtues, in which you were before most wanting? That profession of religion is worth nothing, which, though it may induce a man to do many things, yet leaves him under the power of his favourite sin. Real religion lays the axe to the *root* of the tree; and is not content with lopping off some few of the branches. It spares *no* lust and tolerates *no* sin; much less the one, that most easily besets us. Have you this mark of being a true convert?

Lastly, do you bring forth much fruit; not only fruit good in its nature, but abundant in quality? Have you fruit on *all* your branches; "the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance?" Abound, I beseech you, in these fruits. Add one Christian grace and virtue to another, till the whole be complete. So shall the proofs of your conversion be clear and distinct. So shall you make

your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: but so "an entrance shall be administered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

SERMON XV.

CHRISTIANS COMPLETE IN CHRIST.

COLOSSIANS, ii. 10.

And ye are complete in him.

THE Divinity of Jesus Christ may be considered as the grand key-stone of our holy religion; which unites and cements the whole: the centre, in which all the truths and doctrines of Christianity meet. When Peter declared his belief that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, our Lord told him, that "on this rock," namely, on the great truth contained in this declaration, "He would build His church." St. Paul, in his epistle to Timothy, calls this doctrine "the great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh." And St. John, speaking of Jesus, says, "This is the true God and eternal Life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

It was this great truth which St. Paul had been asserting in the verse before the text, when he had said, speaking of Jesus Christ,

that "in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." And from this statement he deduces another important assertion, which we find in the text, respecting the sufficiency of that salvation, which Christ has provided for us: "And ye are complete in Him." As Christ was completely qualified for His mediatorial work by "all the fulness of the Godhead dwelling in Him bodily;" so believers in Him are completely supplied with all that they want, by their mystical union with Him. Being *in Him* as members of His body, and quickened by His Spirit, He is "made to them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption." Thus are they "complete in Him."

It is this subject on which I purpose on the present occasion to discourse: a subject, which is particularly adapted to assist us in a right and profitable use of that precious ordinance, of which we are invited to participate at the close of this morning's service.*

May the blessing of the Lord be with us, whilst I endeavour to explain to you two things suggested by the text!

I. What is meant by Christians being *complete.*

II. *How* they become so.

* Preached previously to the administration of the Lord's Supper.

I. St. Paul, addressing the Saints and faithful brethren at Colosse, says to them, as we see in the text, "Ye are complete:" which he says to them, not because they were members of that particular church, as if there was any thing peculiar in their situation and circumstances at Colosse which made this term more appropriate to them than to others. No: he addresses them generally as *Christians;* and in this character says to them in words, which are equally applicable to all Christians, "Ye are complete." The word here rendered complete, has the same signification which we usually put upon the word in our own language, namely "*full*," "*having every thing that is needful*," "*wanting nothing*." And when applied to the Christian, as here in the text, it means that he possesses every thing which is necessary for life and godliness: that there is nothing essential to his present happiness, and future glory, which is not provided for him: that he has a sufficiency, an abundance, a perfection of every thing which may promote his real good here and hereafter, in time and to eternity.

This is what is meant when it is said of Christians, that they are *complete.* And what an idea then, does this expression give us of the greatness and extent of their privileges! of the security and blessedness of their state! They are *complete;* complete in every

thing which they can need, in order to be supremely and eternally happy!

It will help, however, to enlarge our conceptions on this subject, if I briefly mention some of the principal things, which in themselves they do want in order to being complete.

They want *Wisdom* and *Knowledge.*

Naturally they are very ignorant. They know not God and the way of salvation. They know not *what* they must do to please Him, nor *how* they must do it. They frequently are unable to distinguish the path of duty. Many roads may offer themselves; and they know not which to choose. Many perplexing thoughts may arise in their minds; and they know not which to prefer. Many opposite counsels may be given them; and they know not which to follow. These things shew the need which they have of wisdom and knowledge. Again,

They need *Pardon* and *Righteousness.*

As sinners, they cannot stand before God in judgement. They have incurred His wrath, and the sentence of His holy law. Unless He freely forgives their sin, and remits their punishment, they must perish for ever. They are also unclean in His sight; and cannot endure His holy presence. They want a righteousness in which they may

stand before Him accepted, and which may hide their shame. Again,

They need *Holiness* and *Purity*.

Their hearts are naturally evil. Sinful inclinations and unholy desires are continually springing up in their souls; and by habit and indulgence have acquired strength and dominion there. But unless these be subdued, and mortified, and kept under, and good inclinations and holy desires prevail within; unless, in short, their natures be made new, and their hearts sanctified, there can be no heaven for them, because there will be in them no meetness for it. Again,

They need *Peace* and *Consolation*.

It is not enough for them that their sins are forgiven: but they must also have a comfortable persuasion of this truth. Their *guilt* must be removed. The sense, the consciousness, the shame of their sins must be so taken away, as to give them inward peace. While they feel themselves to be sinners, (as they cannot but feel to be their state, with humbled and penitent hearts,) yet they must be enabled to look up with hope and confidence to a reconciled Father in heaven; and though sorrowful, yet always to rejoice. Many also are the afflictions in which they need to be comforted. Their hearts are often wounded, and their souls grieved: and where

is the soothing balm which may assuage and heal them? Again,

They need inward *Support* and *Strength.*

Not a few are the trials, the labours, the difficulties, the enemies, which they are often called daily to encounter. And where is there sufficiency for these conflicts? "Without are fightings, within are fears:" and yet their salvation depends upon their perseverance and victory. Think of the many strong and ensnaring temptations, with which the world is constantly assaulting them: yet these must be overcome. Think of the many, unseen, spiritual adversaries, subtle, powerful, implacable, to whose attacks they are every moment exposed: yet these must be resisted and defeated. O, what inward support and strength do Christians require! Once more,

They need *Deliverance* and *Redemption* from the power of death and of the grave.

They must one day die, and pay this debt to sin. Their soul must be separated from its earthly tenement; and the body be left to moulder in the grave. But these enemies must be overcome, and be compelled to give back their prey. Death must lose its sting, and the grave its victory; and the body must be raised incorruptible, and be united again to the soul, before the description in the text can be realized. Till these things be done, Christians can never be *complete:* their salv-

ation cannot be perfected; their joy cannot be full.

From this short and hasty review, of some of the principal things which Christians need, we may form some better idea of the meaning of the description given of them in the text. We see how many things are wanting to render them complete, wisdom and knowledge; pardon and righteousness; holiness and purity; peace and consolation; spiritual support and strength; deliverance from the power of death, and of the grave.

All these things are necessary, are essential for them. But yet, in the face of all these wants, the Apostle says to them, "Ye are complete." 'Ye have a supply, a pro-'vision of all these things: a sufficiency of 'all things necessary for life and godliness. 'Ye *are complete.*'

I proceed then to shew,

II. *How* Christians become thus complete. That they are so, we cannot doubt; for the inspired Apostle himself affirms it. But *how* do they become so? Whence is this completeness? Is it of themselves? Is it of themselves that they have wisdom, righteousness, purity, peace, support, deliverance? No, it is of Christ. It is out of His fulness that all these things come. So says the Apostle in the text, "Ye are complete *in Him*" — "*Him*, in whom dwelleth all the

fulness of the Godhead bodily." Because He is God and man in one Christ, uniting in one person the divine and human natures; therefore, in Him all fulness dwells; that out of this fulness His people may receive all things, of which they stand in need. In themselves they have nothing. In Him they have all things, and "are complete."

Do they need Wisdom and Knowledge? "In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." By His word He instructs and teaches them. By His providences He directs and leads them. By His Spirit He opens their minds to understand His word, and to interpret His providences.

Do they need Pardon and Righteousness? "His blood cleanseth from all sin." He is Himself their "advocate and the propitiation for their sins." He died to make an atonement for them. He bare their transgressions in His own body on the cross. "He is exalted as a prince and a Saviour to give repentance and remission of sins." He has brought in also an everlasting righteousness, even His own perfect obedience unto death, by which He fulfilled the law, and justifies His people. This righteousness He imputes to them: with this He hides their shame, and covers their impurities; with this He clothes them as with the garment of salvation: in this He now accepts them, and deals with

them as righteous: and in this He will at length present them faultless before the presence of His glory.

Do they need Holiness and Purity?

By His grace He creates their hearts anew, and cleanses them by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit. He has given them a precious promise that "sin shall not have dominion over them:" and in fulfilling this promise, He carries on His work of sanctifying grace and mercy in their souls. In subserviency to this end, and with a view to their progressive holiness, He appoints and orders all His dispensations towards them. He corrects, reproves, chastises, tries, and disciplines them; that so He may do them good in the latter end; may humble their pride; may strengthen their graces; and forward in them the heavenly life.

Do they need Peace and Consolation?

It is Christ who gives them peace, and by His Spirit binds up the broken heart. He enables them to see His grace and mercy; to apprehend the full atonement which He has made for sin; to apply it to themselves; to cast their burden at the foot of His cross; and to have peace and joy in believing. He unfolds to them the precious promises of His word: shews them the suitableness and sufficiency of these in every time of sorrow and distress: whispers consolation by His Spirit

to their hearts; and, by shining on them with the light of His countenance, teaches them to go on their way rejoicing.

Do they need Support and Strength?

Here also Christ is sufficient for them. He gives strength unto his people; makes their strength equal to their day; and puts underneath them the everlasting arms. He suffers no enemy finally to subdue them. He provides them with armour; inspires them with courage; and insures them the victory. As for the world, He teaches them to overcome it. As for Satan, He will bruise him under their feet shortly. No weapon formed against them shall prosper. Nothing shall pluck them out of His hands. Lastly,

Do they need Deliverance from Death and the Grave?

He hath overcome both these enemies; and will redeem them in triumph from their power. "O death, He will be thy plague: O grave, He will be thy destruction." He hath taken away the sting of death, which is sin. He has sanctified the valley of death to all his people. He has made it the passage to glory and heaven. He will redeem their bodies from the grave; and will make them like unto his own glorious body.

Such then is the full, perfect, complete provision which is treasured up in Christ for all His people. But *how* do they become

partakers of this provision? By their union with Him. It is because they are joined to Him, who is God and man in one Christ; united to Him in whom all fulness dwells; members of His mystical body; that they partake these privileges. Take notice of the way in which this doctrine is taught in the text. "Ye are complete in Him:" *in Him.* Christians, if they are true Christians, are *in* Christ Jesus," *in Him;* and, therefore, *one* with Him: *in Him,* as the branch is in the tree; as the stone is in the building; as the member is in the body. These are scriptural illustrations of this truth. By these comparisons the Scriptures describe that union, that oneness, which Christ and His people have with each other. "He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit." And from this their union with Him, all their interest in Him springs. Because they are one with Christ, they are *complete.* Of His fulness they receive a supply for all their wants, because they are *in Him.* Such are the truths of which we are reminded in the text. I will now proceed to make a short application of them.

In the first place, my brethren, let us contemplate the glorious and privileged state of true Christians. They are *in Christ,* and they are *complete* in Him. They are one with Him, who is one with the Father; and one with

Him, even as He is one with the Father. And because they are one with Him; therefore they are *complete*. Think of the meaning of this expression: to be *complete*, wanting nothing, needing nothing, destitute of nothing which is necessary for their present, future, and eternal happiness: to have an abundant supply provided for them of every thing which can ensure their safety, felicity, and glory. How little do Christians comprehend; how still less do they enjoy their privileges! If it were not so, should we so often see them cast down, should we so often hear them complaining in the manner we do? Would their knees be feeble, and would their hands hang down? Would they go mourning and fearful, distracted with doubts, and perplexed with anxieties? Would they lament their want of pardon and peace, of righteousness and strength? Would they sink under burdens; be discouraged at trials; and give way to despondency?—Awake, my Christian brethren, awake: arise, and see your privileges; lay hold of them and enjoy them. If you "are Christ's, all things are yours." If you are "in Christ," you are *complete* in Him. If you are true Christians, there is an ample supply laid up in Him for all your wants; pardon, peace, righteousness, and strength. Say not then, that you need these things, when you already have them.

Say not that you are longing for them, when they are already yours. Rather use and enjoy them. Live in the exercise and experience of them. Rejoice in your privileged state; and praise the Lord for His mercies. But,

Secondly, is it in Christ that Christians are complete? Then let them seek this blessing where only it is to be found. Let them seek it in Christ, and not in themselves. Many, who professedly hold the doctrine in the text, yet fail in practically using it. They have a persuasion of their privileged state. They believe that, as Christians, they are entitled to pardon and peace, to strength and comfort. They hope and expect to receive and enjoy these things. But they seem to forget *whence* they are to be had. They are acting, as if these things were to be found in themselves, and to be derived out of some fulness of their own. But in *this way* they never will be found. My brethren, remember one thing. You are complete not in yourselves, but in *Christ*. It is *in Him* that all the blessings which you need are treasured up: and *to Him* you must look, *to Him* you must go for them. You have no righteousness of your own. It is in *His* alone that you can be justified, or can glory. Put then on his righteousness by faith; and rejoice in the perfect obedience which He has wrought out for you and freely puts to your account.

You have no strength of your own. It is in *His* strength alone that you can be strengthened. Believe then his promise of strengthening you according to your need; and go forth in the power of His might. As to peace, you have no real Christian peace in *your own heart.* You will never find it by searching for it there. It is not a native of that soil. You must fetch it in by faith. You must look to Jesus for it. He "is our peace." You must pray to Him to shed it abroad in your heart, and to give you peace and joy in believing. But,

Thirdly, do all our interest in Christ, and our share in the blessings of His mediation, arise from our union with Him? Are Christians complete, because they are in Christ? Then let us endeavour to promote that union, and to make it more secure and lasting. The nearer we live to Christ, the greater experience we shall have of the privileges which He has purchased for us. The more closely we walk with Him, the more sensibly we shall taste His grace, and share His blessings. In fact, our communion in all that He has done and provided for us, will be in proportion to our union with Him, and to the degree in which that union is cemented. Hence, whatever tends to strengthen our union with Him, increases our interest in Him. Such is the tendency of

faith. It is by faith that this union first is formed: for it is by believing in Christ that we become one with Him: and it is by increasing faith that the union is strengthened and confirmed. Such also is the tendency of prayer; of the public ordinances; of the private means of grace; of the study of the Scriptures. All these directly tend to promote our spiritual union with Christ, and should be used by us with a view to this great end.

But especially such is the tendency of that holy sacrament in which we are now invited to participate. It is emphatically called "the *communion* of the body and blood of Christ:" and in receiving these, and spiritually feeding on them, it is expressly said, in the service of our church, that "we are one with Christ, and Christ with us." Hence the supreme importance to Christians of this precious institution. They value it as the appointment of Christ; as a memorial of His grace, and favour to His church; as a pledge of His love; as an earnest of future blessings; and especially, as one of the most efficient means of renewing, and cementing, their union with Him.

With this view, and with these sentiments, may we this day approach the table of the Lord. In ourselves we are unworthy to draw near and to eat the crumbs which fall from it.

But let us go *in faith*, and then we shall go "*complete in Him;*" and may we have grace *so* to eat His flesh and drink His blood, that we may evermore "dwell in Him, and He in us!"

SERMON XVI.

THE DUTY AND COMFORT OF SUBMISSION UNDER AFFLICTION.

JOHN, xiii. 7.

Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

THESE words are connected with that very extraordinary instance of condescension in our blessed Redeemer; when, assuming the habit of a servant, he performed the menial office of *washing His disciples' feet.* Peter, not enduring to see his beloved Master in such an humbling situation, and not understanding the important practical instruction which this transaction was intended to convey, proceeded, with his usual forwardness, to testify his disapprobation of it; asking, in a manner, which shewed how greatly he was offended at this supposed act of degrad-

ation, "Lord, dost *Thou wash my feet.*" To this question our Lord replied in the words of the text, reminding His Apostle that it was his duty to submit to the will of his heavenly Master; and however strange this proceeding might *now* appear to him, to give Him credit for the wisdom with which He performed it; and to wait in faith and patience till its peculiar object should be disclosed. "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter."

But applicable as this answer was to the particular circumstances of the case, it contains also a declaration of general importance and use. The Lord's dealings with His people are often very mysterious, His dispensations towards them are dark and perplexing. They cannot understand his meaning in them. He appears to be afflicting them without any adequate reason or design. They are at a loss to conjecture His object, and to think what the end is to be. Now, in such circumstances, at such times, how suitably may the text be addressed to them! With how much reason may they suppose Him to say unto them, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter." It is in this view, and application of the text, that I wish to consider it in my present discourse. I wish to point out the consolation and direction, which, in times of trouble and

trial, the real Christian may derive from contemplating the truths here brought before his notice. In fact, submission to the divine will was the great lesson which our Lord intended to inculcate upon Peter, when He addressed to him these words: and the same is the lesson which He would at all times inculcate upon all His disciples; and especially under the circumstances which we are here supposing. Are they in affliction and trouble? Are they in doubt as to the meaning of the trial? Cannot they discern what its results may be? Are they enquiring, "Wherefore does the Lord contend with us?" In this situation, their present duty is submission; submission to the will of God, who calls them to suffer; to take up the cross which He imposes on them, without repining; and in faith and patience to possess their souls, casting their care and burden on the Lord. Now, at such times, in exciting them to the discharge of this most difficult duty, the text furnishes three powerful considerations.

I. It reminds them that their trial or affliction, whatever it may be, of whatever kind or measure, whatever shape or form it may take, or from whatever quarter it may appear to come, is yet the very trial and affliction which the Lord himself has called them to endure. That they are enduring it, is *His*

doing. "*What I do*" is the language which He might use in respect to every possible description, or degree of suffering to which His people may be subjected. This is in itself a most important and consolatory consideration: and it may be well to review for a moment the scriptural grounds on which it rests. — We are taught throughout the Scriptures, that nothing in this world, no, not even the most trivial event, occurs without the knowledge, permission, and over-ruling controul of Him who sees, directs, and orders all things in heaven and earth. "Not a sparrow falleth to the ground, but he seeth it." We are given to understand that there is no such thing as that which men call *chance* or *accident* in human affairs, or in natural events. "Trouble springeth not out of the ground." The rod falls not, without being appointed. But it is Christ, who is now advanced to the head of the kingdom. He, as Mediator, rules and governs all things. "*All* power," says He to His disciples, "is given unto me in heaven and in earth." "All things are committed into His hands." And, consequently, the whole kingdom of providence, as well as those of nature and of grace, are now administered by Him, who once in our nature "suffered, the just for the unjust." And if all other things are directed and appointed by Jesus Christ, much more is it so

with those things which belong to and concern His people. He is, especially, "Head over all things to *the church*." All who believe in Him, and by faith are united to Him, and walk humbly dependent on Him, are, in a peculiar manner, the objects of His love and care. He regards them with a special affection; and superintends their affairs with a special attention. He rejoices over them with joy. He has pleasure in their prosperity. He delights over them to do them good. In respect to His superintending providence in their behalf, it is expressly said, "He suffers no man to do them wrong: He reproves even kings for their sakes, saying, Touch not mine anointed and do my prophets no harm." Was it not particularly to His disciples, that He said, "The hairs of your heads are all numbered!" What conclusion then do these statements justify us in drawing in reference to the trials and troubles of the people of God; but that they are all ordered, appointed, and measured by Him, who is their Saviour and Redeemer, and loveth them better than the apple of His own eye. — My dear brethren, such of you as at this time may be carrying your cross, and groaning under the burden of some great and heavy affliction, let me beseech you to attend to this most important and comfortable truth. You are carrying no cross, and bear-

ing no burden, but that which He, who loves you better than you can love yourself, requires you to carry and bear, for His sake, and for your own good. Remember that the rod is *His* rod; the stroke is *His* stroke. You are prone to forget this great truth, which above every other is the one best calculated to reconcile you to your state and your trial. You are prone to look at inferior causes, to secondary instruments, and to ascribe your suffering, or at least the degree of it, to some accidents or contingencies which appear to you to have had an unfavourable influence on your concerns. You are apt to say, 'O *if* 'this thing had not happened, my trouble 'had not taken place. Or *if* that thing had 'not occurred, my trial would have been less.' But recollect that there are no *ifs* in the case. Every thing which has taken place, has taken place by the appointment of Jesus Christ. Had it been His will, that the affliction should not have occurred at all; had it been His pleasure, that it should have been less heavy, or less protracted; He could with perfect ease have accomplished these objects. The circumstances to which you attribute the aggravation of your affliction were under His controul equally with those which produced the affliction itself. Every step which has led to it, every particular which apparently

has increased it, have been specially ordered by Him; who, bitter as the cup may be which He has placed in your hands, could as easily have infused into it many other ingredients, which might have rendered it far more nauseous. You must be sensible that, heavy as your trial may be, it is yet not so heavy as it might have been. There are circumstances, which, if they had occurred, would have greatly increased it. See here, then, a proof of the restraining and preventing power of the Lord. He has fixed not only the nature of your affliction, but also the measure of it. He has appointed, not only the cross itself, but also the exact weight and burden of it. Whatever you are suffering, in kind or degree, remember He says, "*I have done it.*" — And what an important consideration is this towards disposing us to submission and obedience! How strongly and directly does it tend to subdue every rising and rebellious thought, and to pacify and tranquillise the soul in the midst of its deepest sorrows and perturbations! We find this consideration giving peace to the saints of old, under their complicated trials. Aaron, and Job, and David, and Hezekiah — all of them made use of it for the purpose of reconciling themselves to their state. And I pray God, that such may be the effect of this consideration on the minds of those, who, like these distin-

guished sufferers, may now for a season be under manifold temptations.

II. Another Consideration, by which the duty of submission under afflictive dispensations is powerfully enforced, arises from our present ignorance of the design or object of the Lord in any particular visitation. He says to Peter, as we have seen in the text, "What I do, *thou knowest not now.*" I observed to you at the beginning of this discourse, that the Lord's dealings are often very mysterious. "His judgements are unsearchable, and his ways past finding out." "Clouds and darkness are round about him." In the works of nature, of providence, and of grace, His counsels are unfathomable. "We cannot by searching find out God;" and are oftentimes utterly at a loss to perceive what He is doing, and to calculate upon the design and end of His operations. Such indeed must be the case. For how can our limited faculties penetrate the depths of His infinite perfections? How can we, who are ignorant of so many things, and see not a day before us, comprehend the purposes of Him, who is the all-wise God, and knows and foresees all things? And if these remarks be true as to other points, are they less true in respect to His dealings with His people, and with the trials and afflictions which He is pleased to send on them? These dispensations often-

times assume a very perplexing and mysterious aspect. The *reason* for which they are sent; the *course* which they are to take; the *end* which they are to answer; the *time* during which they are to continue, and the *means* by which they are to be terminated; are all matters of doubt and speculation, concerning which no satisfactory, perhaps no probable conjecture can be formed. Every thing seems to be involved in mystery and darkness. The sufferers themselves can discern no cause for their afflictions; no object to be attained by it; no way of getting through it. How ignorant on these points was Joseph, when he was sold by his brethren into a seemingly hopeless captivity; and afterwards cast by Potiphar into prison, and suffered to lie there forgotten! How ignorant was Job of the purpose and end of those complicated sufferings, which came so heavily and rapidly upon him! And is not this frequently the case at present? Are not God's people oftentimes *very ignorant* with respect to the afflictions which He is bringing on them? Suddenly overwhelmed by some unexpected calamity; stunned by some severe and unlooked-for blow; immersed at once in a sea of troubles and difficulties; they are utterly at a loss to conjecture *why* the Lord is thus dealing with them; *how* they shall ever be able to bear the burden imposed on them;

and by *what* process it ever can be lightened or removed. As to all these points, they feel the full force of the language in the text, "What I do thou knowest not now." 'True indeed (they are ready to say), we do 'not know what He is doing.' But what, in the mean time, is the lesson which this their ignorance of the Divine proceedings inculcates? What is the duty which it prescribes? Its language is this: "Be still, and know that I am God." *Submission* is the lesson, the duty, which it teaches.

Afflicted and disconsolate mourner! though *you* are ignorant of what God is doing in this His dispensation towards you, yet remember that *He* is not ignorant. *You* cannot see, by reason of your imperfection, the design of His present dealings with you: but *He* sees His own purposes, and has an end to answer by them, which He knows that they are exactly calculated to accomplish. *Submit* yourself therefore to His hand. Bow before Him with unfeigned resignation and humility; and wait in faith till He have mercy upon you; till, by removing the clouds which now hang over His operations, He shall make darkness light before you, and crooked things straight. I say, wait *in faith*: for, as a child of God, this is your distinction and your privilege. The men of this world, who know not God, who walk by sight, who will not

look further than they can see — let such persons murmur and rebel against the Divine dispensations because of their dark and mysterious character: let them refuse to submit to His providence because they cannot fully discover and comprehend its proceedings: let them exclaim, in the unhumbled state of their hearts, "Why should we wait for the Lord any longer?" Such conduct and language would well become such persons: it might be expected from them; for they know no better, and possess no higher principle to influence and guide them. But it is not so with *you*, who believe in Jesus Christ, and have tasted his grace and love. You know the Lord; and, though you see not all His ways, you can trust Him. You walk by faith: you profess not to walk by sight. It is not by what you *see* of God, but by what you *believe* of Him, that your lives and hopes are regulated. It is your privilege to see an unseen Saviour; and to be assured that in the darkest night *to you*, there is no darkness *with Him*. It is your privilege to know, that, though you are ignorant and see nothing, He sees, directs, and orders all things for your good. What, then, have you, under present afflictions, to do, but to believe, and "quietly to wait for the salvation of God?" What have you to do, but "in patience to possess your souls;" and to

humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, till in due time He shall lift you up, and unravel all these mysteries?

Which leads me to notice,

III. The other Consideration, by which the duty of submission under afflictive dispensations, however dark and perplexing, is powerfully enforced in the text; namely, the promise of a favourable issue in due time. This promise is implied at least in our Saviour's words, and is plainly given in many parts of Scripture. "What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." As if the Lord should say, 'At present you may not be able to see or comprehend the object which I have in view, nor 'the tendency of the means which I am 'using to accomplish it; but, hereafter, in 'due time, sooner or later, an end will be 'put to this mystery. You will then see 'clearly all that I have been doing. You 'will then see, that all these dispensations, 'which are now so perplexing and painful, 'have been appointed in mercy, wisdom, and 'love. You will then see, that the way by 'which I am now leading you is the safest, 'the shortest, and, in the end, the least steep 'and rugged, by which I could have brought 'you to that place of rest and peace and 'glory, for which I am now training you. 'It is "through much tribulation that you

'must enter into the kingdom of heaven." 'You would doubtless prefer that road which 'has in it the fewest difficulties. But *you* 'know not which that is. If left to follow 'your own choice, you would take that path 'which *appears to you* the least difficult and 'painful. But on trial it would not prove 'so. I have therefore selected another for 'you. I have myself brought you into it. 'I am conducting you along it: and, though 'at present you may be disposed to think 'that your own way would have been pre-'ferable, yet be assured that it would not. 'Believe this on my word. I, who know 'what is best, have chosen the best for you. 'For the present submit to my appointment. 'And when the time is come, in which it 'will be expedient for you to see what I now 'require you to believe, then, every vail will 'be removed; and you will know beyond a 'doubt, that all which I have told you is 'true, and that all which I have done for 'you is good.' Such are the particulars suggested by the promise in the text, "*Thou shalt know hereafter.*" And does not experience confirm the truth of them? Did not Joseph at last know the Lord's purposes in His dealings with Him? He lived to see that captivity and false accusation, that imprisonment and neglect, were the appointed path to happiness and honour. Did not Job

at length see "the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy?" He lived to reap the fruit of all His trials. When their end was answered, the "Lord turned His captivity;" and "blessed the latter end of Job more than the beginning."

And what, my brethren, forbids but that such should be the case with you? What forbids, if, like these saints of old, you now sow in tears, but that like them you shall also reap in joy? What forbids, though you may not know now what the Lord is doing, but that you shall know hereafter? Doubt not but that it will be so. Distrust not the power and truth of Him who hath all power in heaven and earth, and whose word faileth not. Look forward, in humble but confident expectation, to that time, when the present clouds shall be dispersed, the present burden shall be taken away: that time, when you shall clearly perceive the design of the present dispensation, and shall be satisfied that it was a gracious and merciful design. Such a time will come "hereafter," however unlikely it may now appear. Perhaps in this world, but certainly in the next, you will know, however contrary such a knowledge may now seem to present feeling and experience, that "all the ways of the Lord," and this among the rest, "have been mercy and truth" to you, if you are one of

those who keep His covenant and His testimonies. Check, then, despondency. Resist unbelief. Say with the conflicting Psalmist, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance and my God."

I will now conclude with one important inference, strongly resulting from the subject before us. How excellent, my brethren, is the knowledge of Jesus Christ! What a gain is godliness! How truly has it the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come! People naturally undervalue religion: they make light of it: they seek it not for themselves; and they often despise those who do seek it. But yet you have seen, in this discourse, what a blessing and privilege it confers. You have seen that it administers support and consolation at those times, and under those circumstances, in which they are most wanted, and in which nothing else can furnish them. All persons are liable in this world to seasons of peculiar trial and trouble. Irreligious as well as religious people are exposed to such afflictions. But how great is the difference when they *do* arrive! The person who has no religion to sustain him at such a season, can find no adequate support. Hence it so frequently happens, that people faint under their bur-

dens; sink into despondency; forsake their duties; undervalue and reject remaining blessings; sometimes lose their senses; and possibly even lay violent hands on themselves. This is that sorrow of the world which worketh death. These are the natural consequences of the operation of severe affliction on a heart unhumbled by grace, and destitute of religious support. On the other hand, contemplate the submission and resignation, the peace and hope which true religion inspires under the heaviest and darkest night of trial and sorrow. And learn from this view of the case to esteem religion aright. Esteem it as your best guide and comforter through life, as well as your stay in death, and your only hope for eternity. And while you learn to esteem it aright, O learn also to seek it aright. Seek it for yourselves. Consider how cheaply it will be purchased at the price even of all other things. Be ready to part with all things for it. Make the exercise and the experience of it the end and object of your life. Regard every dispensation, however painful, which strengthens its influence in your soul, as a mercy and a blessing. And may the God of all consolation increase His power and shed abroad His love in your hearts, and fill you with all peace and joy in believing through Jesus Christ!

SERMON XVII.

THE PEOPLE OF CHRIST EXHORTED TO LAY ASIDE THEIR FEARS.

LUKE, xii. 32.

Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

How great are the consolation and encouragement contained in this passage; especially when we bear in mind that it proceeded from the gracious lips of Him, who is Himself the way, the truth, and the life! With what force and sweetness do these words come home to the heart of all His true disciples — "Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom!"

May His blessed Spirit be with us, while I endeavour to communicate, to those who are entitled to receive it, the rich consolation which the consideration of this passage is calculated to convey! With this view, let us consider,

I. The Exhortation here addressed to the people of Christ.

II. The Argument by which it is enforced.

I. The Exhortation is this: "Fear not, little flock."

If it had not been expressly said by St. Luke, that Jesus spake these words to "His disciples," we should have had no doubt to *whom* they were addressed, from the title which He gives them, "little flock." To whom else could these words be applied, but to the people of Christ; to those who have always been few in number, compared with the ungodly and irreligious, among whom they have lived; and who, from their attachment to the good Shepherd — from the love they bear to Him, the trust they place in Him, and the obedience they render to Him — are alone deserving to be called "the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand?" They are His sheep, who hear His voice and follow Him; who know Him, and are known of Him; who now are the objects of His care and love; and will hereafter stand at His right hand, and be owned by Him as the "blessed of His Father, for whom the kingdom has been prepared from the foundation of the world."

These, then, are the persons — His humble, harmless, believing, obedient people — to whom He here addresses this tender and encou-

raging exhortation, "Fear not." The very circumstance of giving them this exhortation implies the need they have of it. Why should He bid them not to fear, if they were not in danger of being afraid? Doubtless they are exposed to many causes of fear; to many things, which in themselves may justly make them afraid; to many trials and difficulties, which cannot but naturally excite their apprehensions, and fill them with alarm.

It may help to explain our subject, if I set before you some of the grounds on which the people of Christ may at times be tempted to fear. And I know not that I can better accomplish my purpose than by employing the very image suggested in the text. The idea of "*a little flock*" will furnish an apt and easy illustration of the subject.

Let us then represent to ourselves a little flock of sheep travelling through a wide and barren wilderness; and let us suppose that, thus circumstanced, they could be sensible of their situation, and of the wants and perils to which they were exposed. Would they not have many causes of alarm? Would there not be many things which would excite their fears?

In the first place, they would be terrified at the thought of the cruel and ravenous enemies with which they were surrounded. Every moment they might be surprised by

the roaring lion, or the prowling fox, or the hidden serpent, without any means on their part of escape or defence. Beset by such adversaries, they might reasonably fear that every day would be their last.

Again, ignorant of the road by which they must travel through this wilderness, and arrive at those rich and fertile pastures, after which they were seeking, they could not but fear being entangled and lost by the way. Here would be a continual source of anxiety and apprehension. They would not proceed a day on their journey without fears that they were going wrong: and thus, in proportion to the dangers of their journey, the intricacy of the path, and their unacquaintedness with it, would greatly increase their alarms.

Once more, the apprehension of want and famine would be another fruitful source of uneasiness. They might often be reduced to extremities, and as often delivered by some unexpected relief: still, however, they might fear that it would not be always thus; but that, some day or other in the course of their pilgrimage, their provision might fail; and they might perish at last through want in the barren wilderness.

Such we may reasonably conclude would be the fears and anxieties of the "little flock," in the circumstances supposed: and

now let us apply these things to the spiritual flock, to the people of Christ, the sheep of His pasture, and the lambs of His fold. And let us see whether they have not like grounds and causes for fear.

The world is to them a wilderness; a wilderness through which they are travelling towards a better country, that is, a heavenly; a land of heat and drought, beset with dangers, and filled with their enemies. Their adversary, the devil, at one time like a roaring lion goeth about seeking to devour them; while, at another, with the craftiness of the fox, or the subtlety of the serpent, he labours to beguile and corrupt them from their simplicity in Christ Jesus. How many snares and temptations does he prepare for them! How many instruments does he employ; how many agents does he set at work in order to destroy them! The things of the world, with all their captivating seductions, and the people of the world, with all their power, art, and influence, are among the means to which he has recourse for carrying on his hostile purposes against the people of Christ. And what are the means of defence or escape, which they naturally possess? What is their strength and power against these formidable foes? Alas! their strength is weakness. They have no might in themselves, no means of successful resistance. Nay, worse; far

worse: they have a secret enemy within, a traitor in their very heart, who himself takes part with the enemy, and even desires to be overcome. The new nature, indeed, which they have received from the Lord, strives and struggles for victory. It resists the devil and his works, the world and its temptations: but its severest conflicts are with the remainder of the old nature, which still contends for mastery, and lusts against the new. And in such circumstances is there not cause for fear?

My Christian brethren, you who know something of the nature of this spiritual conflict; who often groan, being burdened under a sense of inward corruption; who long and strive to serve the Lord Jesus Christ, but yet find a rebellious heart within; "another law in your members, warring against the law of your mind"—say, does not the experience of these things often fill you with alarm? Does it not at times excite in you doubts and apprehensions as to your final salvation? Does it not tempt you, in some seasons of conflict, to give way to desponding thoughts, and to be afraid that the devil, the world, or the flesh, will one day prevail against you; and that thus your latter end will be worse than the beginning? But further,

Another ground of fear to the people of Christ is their ignorance and unacquainted-

ness with the way in which they should go; their readiness to be discouraged at the difficulties in their road; and their propensity to turn aside, and to wander into other paths. How often do they find themselves in such situations, that they can scarcely discern the path of duty, and see the course which they ought to follow! Unexpected obstacles present themselves, and seem to bar their road; while interest, or inclination, or the solicitations of worldly friends, urge them to turn from the path which conscience and the Scripture require them to take, and to go some other way. My brethren, do not some of you know and feel these things? Conscious of your own ignorance, and aware of the intricacies and difficulties of your path, are you not at times afraid of going wrong? Do you not fear lest you should wander from the way of duty and of simple obedience to the Lord; and lest, being entangled and drawn aside, you should perish in the bye-paths of ungodliness and sin? I am sure that where the conscience is tender, and self-diffidence prevails, the heart is peculiarly exposed to alarm of this kind; and that many troubled souls, dear and precious to the Lord, travel mournfully towards the heavenly Canaan, from a continual apprehension that, the path being so intricate, they shall never be able to find it; or that, the obstacles being

so great, they shall never be able to overcome them. But again,

The failure of provision by the way, of those means and accommodations which are necessary for the support and comfort of the present life, is still another fruitful cause of anxiety and alarm. That the people of Christ are frequently assaulted by fears on this subject is plain from experience; and that such fears are those to which the exhortation in the text principally refers, is evident from the whole tenure of the discourse into which our Lord introduces it. He had been warning his disciples throughout against that over-careful and anxious spirit about worldly things to which they, as well as others, were naturally prone. "Take no thought," says he, "for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. Seek not what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; neither be ye of a doubtful mind." In reference to which admonitions he adds the exhortation in the text, "Fear not, little flock." The people of Christ have commonly been a poor and an afflicted people; have possessed but little of the things of this life, and have been much harassed by worldly trials and difficulties; and, thus circumstanced, how likely it is that they should fear! My brethren, such of you as answer to this description, will best know the truth

of these remarks. You will best know, how often you are tempted to fear lest you should one day come to want; lest your present means of support should fail. You are ready too often to say, 'Though *now* it is well 'with us, yet what may become of us here-'after? What shall we do in times of sick-'ness? What will become of us, when age 'and infirmity shall come? At these pros-'pects our hearts fail us; our spirits faint 'within us.'

Such, then, are some of those fears to which the people of Christ are exposed; and in reference to which they are exhorted in the language of the text, "Fear not." And hence we see both the necessity as well as the meaning of the exhortation. We may consider the Lord as thus graciously address-ing them: 'O my dear and beloved people, 'my little flock, for whom I have laid down 'my life, I know the perils and difficulties 'to which you are exposed, and the fears 'and alarms to which you are consequently 'liable. You need protection, and guidance, 'and provision by the way; and you are apt 'to be afraid that these things will not be 'vouchsafed to you. You fear lest you 'should at last perish in the way, and so 'come short of the expected end. But I 'say unto you, Fear not. Lay aside such 'fears. They are unnecessary; they are

'unreasonable; they are groundless: They 'are hurtful to your peace and usefulness. 'They are discreditable to your religion. 'They are inconsistent with your profession. 'They are sources of trouble and distress 'from which the Gospel is designed to set 'you free. Then lay them aside. Put 'them away for ever. "Fear not, little 'flock."' Such is the Exhortation in the text.

We now consider,

II. The Argument by which it is enforced.

It is contained in these words: "For it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Surely there is enough in this passage to allay the fears and to comfort the hearts of the most timorous and desponding. May I be enabled to unfold the treasure contained in it!

In the first place, then, let the people of Christ call to mind, that God is their *Father*. Our Lord, speaking to them in the text, says, "your Father." Being members of Christ, they are children of God. This is the privilege resulting from their union and fellowship with the Son, that *His* father is become *their* Father. "To as many as receive Him, He gives power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name." But if God be a *Father* to the people of Christ, let them consider the import of this

name. What is the disposition of a father towards his child? What is his feelings towards them? It is kindness, affection, and love. A father loves and pities his own children. He regards them with a strong and tender attachment. But the love which our heavenly Father bears towards *His* children is a thousand times stronger and tenderer than any love which an earthly father can feel for his offspring. It is "a love which passeth knowledge" or conception. It is the love of God; of Him whose name, whose character is love; and who describes Himself as the Father of His people, that He may convey to them the strongest possible intimation of His divine affection for them.

In the second place, then, let them recollect that this their heavenly Father has prepared *an inheritance* for them; and what kind of an inheritance is it? Such an inheritance as the children of such a Father might well expect to receive; a royal inheritance; "a crown," a "kingdom." When the Scripture would describe to us things which we cannot now comprehend, it makes use of comparisons, and illustrates its meaning by referring us to things which we do understand. Hence, they represent the glory and felicity of heaven, as our Saviour does here in the text, under the idea of a king-

dom; a "kingdom which cannot be moved;" "an everlasting kingdom." Though even this idea, expressive as it is, can doubtless convey to us but a very inadequate conception of that bliss and joy, of that honour and exaltation, of those inexhaustible riches, of those endless pleasures and glories, which it is intended to describe. Suffice it in one word to say, that the inheritance is such as their heavenly Father, the God of all power and love, has prepared for His dearly-purchased and His dearly-beloved children.

In the third place, then, let them reflect, that with respect to this kingdom, great and glorious as it is, beyond all our thoughts and conceptions, yet it is their Father's "*good pleasure to give it them.*" He has prepared and provided it for them. He has promised it to them; and it will be His delight and His joy to put them into possession of it. It is His good pleasure that they should have it; and that, not because they have deserved it, not because they have done any thing to purchase it, or can ever do any thing to make Him an adequate return for it—no; but because He delighteth in mercy, and hath pleasure in the felicity of His chosen. "It his *His good pleasure* to give them the kingdom." It is a royal gift, a paternal portion, freely bestowed on them for Christ's sake, without any reference to

their merits or deservings. "Death is the *wages* of sin." This is the recompense which they have deserved; and if they were dealt with after their deservings, this is the recompense which they would receive. "But eternal life is *the gift* of God through Jesus Christ:" and hence Christ himself, when speaking of his sheep, says, "*I give* unto them eternal life." The inheritance reserved in heaven for the people of God is "of grace, and not of debt." It is "freely bestowed on them through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus their Lord."

Now, then, my brethren, let us see how the Argument, thus opened, applies to the case before us, and enforces the Exhortation in the text.

"Fear not, little flock;" fear not that you shall be left to wander in the wilderness without protection, guidance, and provision by the way. Have you not in heaven *a Father*—an Almighty Father, who loves you with the tenderest love; watches over you with the most anxious care; and desires your happiness with even more than a father's heart? And will He ever leave you or forsake you? Will He suffer you to perish, or permit your enemies to triumph over you? Is it possible that He can forget you, or can cease to protect and keep you? Observe the very forcible manner in which

the Lord himself, in another passage, expressly refutes the supposition of such a possibility. "Can a woman," He asks, "forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea," He answers, "they may forget;" such instances of the most unnatural conduct may possibly occur: "yet, will I not forget you." Hear, again, the language of our Saviour in reference to His little flock in another place. Having declared in the passage before cited, that He "gives unto His sheep eternal life," He immediately adds, "and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all: and none is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Besides, hath He not provided *an inheritance* for you? Hath He not designed, hath He not promised to make you inconceivably blessed with Himself for ever? And is it possible that He will not bring you safely into the possession of this inheritance? Consider, my dear brethren, how the case stands. God, your heavenly and almighty Father, has prepared, at an infinite expense to Himself, a rich and glorious kingdom for you, when your present pilgrimage shall be over. He has, for this purpose, called you to Himself; has made

known His gracious intentions to you; has engaged you to set out on your heavenly course; has hitherto preserved and led you on your way: and now, after all that He has done, can you reasonably suppose that He will desert you; will withdraw his loving kindness from you; and will leave you at last to wander for ever from the way, or to perish for want of provisions by the road? Is God so capricious? Is the Almighty so changeable? Have you really any ground for such suspicions, such apprehensions as these? Oh! be ashamed of your unbelief. Be ashamed of your fears. Confide in the love and promise, the protection and guidance, of your heavenly Father. "Cast all your care upon Him, knowing that He careth for you." He hath said, "Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee, I will help thee: yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." Are you prone to err, and to wander from the way? He hath again said, "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it: when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." And with respect to worldly things, He has again and again promised, that "bread shall be given you, your waters shall be sure." "Seek first the kingdom of God, and His

righteousness, and all these things shall *be added* unto you; for your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of these things." What more can be said to remove your fears, and strengthen your heart? Hath God promised, and will He not do it? Is it His pleasure to give you a kingdom: and will He not bring you into it? Nay, rather will He not minister unto you abundantly, a glorious entrance into it? Oh! put your trust in Him. Rejoice in His holy word. Hope unto the end. Let the certainty of that unspeakable felicity, which awaits you when this short pilgrimage shall be ended, constrain and animate you now to walk more closely, decidedly, and devotedly with your God and Father; to seek more intimate communion with your blessed Redeemer and Saviour; to live more entirely on the promises of Scripture, in dependence on the aid of the Holy Spirit, and in a faithful, cheerful, and active discharge of every duty of that particular station in which the providence of God may have placed you. Thus, you will find your fears daily growing less, and your hope, and peace, and joy, strengthening and increasing continually. "Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Imprint these words on your memory. Meditate upon

them; and may they dwell in you richly in all wisdom!

And here, I wish that I could faithfully finish my discourse; but, it is my office rightly to divide the word of truth, and to give to every one his portion of meat in due season. While, therefore, I am endeavouring to minister peace and consolation to the people of Christ, and would encourage them to lay aside unnecessary fears, I am compelled to hold a very different language to others; to those, who with a Christian name, or a Christian profession, have no real faith in Christ, nor live a Christian life: or to those, who having once known the way of life, have turned from the holy commandments delivered unto them. To such I cannot say, "Fear not." To such I cannot say, 'You have God for a Father; you have His 'promises of protection, guidance, and 'provision. You shall never perish, never 'wander, never want. There is a glorious 'inheritance prepared for you.' No: to such I cannot say these things. What I must say to them is this: 'You have God 'for your enemy; you have the devil for 'your father; you have hell for your por-'tion.' The same irresistible voice, which 'will pronounce the blessed sentence on the 'sheep, will say to *you*, "Depart ye cursed

'into everlasting fire."' Instead, therefore, of being comforted, you have great need of being alarmed; and would to God that I could alarm you! so alarm you, that you might be filled with fear for your everlasting safety, and thus be induced to flee from that wrath to come. Oh! brethren, if you would but in earnest turn to Jesus Christ, and seek Him even now with all your heart, you would surely find Him. He would admit you into His fold, notwithstanding all your past disobedience, ingratitude, and sin. He would yet place you among His children; would pardon your sins; would change your nature; and fit and reserve you for His heavenly kingdom. Oh! why will you perish, when such a Saviour is ready to receive you? Why will you any longer turn away from Him, who is ready to become your advocate with the Father, and the propitiation for your sins?

SERMON XVIII.

THE NATURE AND PROFITABLENESS OF FAMILY RELIGION.

2 SAMUEL, vi. 12.

And it was told King David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, because of the ark of God.

IT is my intention, on the present occasion, to discourse to you on the great duty of family religion; a duty, of the nature and profitableness of which the text will furnish an obvious illustration; and in reference to which let us humbly pray that God will prepare and dispose our hearts clearly to perceive what we ought to do, and will give us grace, wisdom, and courage to perform the same.

Obed-edom, the person of whom it hath pleased the Holy Ghost in this passage to testify, was a Levite: While the testimony borne to him is peculiarly striking and inter-

esting. He is spoken of as a man singularly and eminently blessed of the Lord; blessed in his own person, in his family, and in his substance: for it is not only in the text we read that "the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertained unto him;" but in the preceding verse also it is said that "the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his household;" and again, 1 Chron. xiii. 14. we are told that "the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that he had:" in addition to which testimonies, we further learn from the text, that the blessing which thus attended Obed-edom was a matter of public observation and notoriety. "It *was told* King David, saying, The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him." Nor is it *the fact only* which is thus stated in the text; the cause of it is also assigned, and assigned as being no less notorious than the fact itself. "The Lord hath blessed the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertaineth unto him, *because of the ark of God.*" So in the two other places before cited, the mention of his blessedness stands in immediate connection with this circumstance, that the "ark of the Lord remained in his house, and continued with his family in his house." What then was the ark of God, and how came it into Obed-edom's house?

When the Lord, having brought Israel out of Egypt, took them into covenant with himself, and set up his worship among them, he directed Moses to make an ark or chest of wood, and to overlay it within and without with pure gold, and to make a covering to it of massy gold, which was called the mercy-seat; and to put within it the two tables, containing the law of the ten commandments. The ark, thus prepared, was an eminent type of our Saviour, with his sinless human nature, which saw no corruption, in personal union with the Divine nature, having the holy law of God written in his heart; while being placed within the holy of holies; approached once in the year by the high-priest alone, with the blood of the sacrifice, and with the incense burning; and overshadowed by the visible glory, it was an object of peculiar sanctity to the nation of Israel, a symbol of the Divine presence with them, and a pledge of the covenanted mercies of God towards them. Such was the ark of God, which they had brought with them into the land of Canaan; and which, in consequence of a train of circumstances detailed in the sacred history, was remaining, when David was made king, in the town of Kirjath-jearim. That king, however, soon after his coming to the throne, hastened, from a zealous attachment to the ordinances of God,

to remove this symbol of His presence to a suitable place, which he had prepared on Mount Zion for its reception. But his zeal on the occasion was a zeal "not according to knowledge." Presuming, it is probable, on the integrity of his intentions, and the goodness of the work, he neglected to enquire of God, and to examine what was written in the law respecting the removing of the ark. Thus the whole attempt was conducted with great informality and want of reverence. The ark, instead of being carried, as it ought to have been, on the shoulders of the Levites, was placed upon a new cart; the care of which was confided to two young men, who had been in attendance on the ark in Kirjath-jearim. But it appears, that familiarity with this sacred symbol had diminished their reverence for it, so that when on the road the oxen happened to stumble, Uzzah, one of the young men in question, "put forth his hand to the ark of God," and to prevent it from falling, "took hold of it." His intention apparently was good; but God smote him for his error, "and there he died by the ark of God." Thus did the Lord exhibit his aweful character, and show that He is indeed "greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." The reverence, however, which God requires, is

not a base and servile fear: for this feeling, instead of drawing men to Him, only drives them from Him. Yet this was the feeling which now affected David. Displeased at this interruption in his work, he was "afraid of the Lord, and he said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me?" His religious affections, his zeal, his hope, and his joy, were all at an end; and he would not bring the ark any nearer to him, lest he, like Uzzah, should be destroyed by it. What then was to be done with this symbol of the Divine presence? David, afraid himself to receive it, carried it aside into a house — the house of that very Obed-edom, of whom we have already been speaking. In this emergency, under these circumstances, not alarmed at late events, this man readily entertained it beneath his roof. Assured that its presence was in itself a pledge of the Divine favour and covenant, and that when regarded with reverence it would bring with it good and not evil, he was not deterred by the judgement on Uzzah, or by the discouraging example of David, from granting it admittance; but with humble confidence received it into his house; and, while he treated it with all becoming respect, doubtless rejoiced in the privilege and honour thus graciously conferred upon him. And what was the result? — "The Lord blessed the house of

Obed-edom, and all that pertained unto him, *because of the ark of God.*"

From this short narrative I shall now take occasion to remind you of the Nature and Profitableness of family religion.

I. The Nature of family religion.

In conformity to the language of the narrative which we have been considering, family religion may be said to consist in humbly and thankfully admitting the ark of God into our house. I need not remind you that there is no ark of God, which can now be literally received into our houses; neither does religion now consist in the performance of such services, which, however typical and prescribed under the Jewish dispensation, would yet be gross and carnal under the purer light of Christianity, where the substance has succeeded to the shadow that prefigured it. To receive the ark of God into *our* houses, is to receive Him whom the ark represented and symbolized, even Jesus Christ. When under the Christian dispensation, we cause the name of Christ to be reverenced in our houses; when we regulate our families by a regard to the doctrines and precepts of His holy Gospel; when we order the concerns of our households with a view to His favour and glory; when in humble faith we commit them into His hands, and seek to conduct them in agreement with His

word, then we may be said figuratively to receive the ark of God into our house.

But more clearly to explain the subject, let us for a moment represent to ourselves in what manner the family of Obed-edom would probably be affected during the time in which this symbol of the Divine presence took up its abode among them. Impressed with a sense of the continual nearness of that great and covenant-God and Saviour whom it represented, the different members of his household would live under the influence of a holy fear, which would manifest itself in all their proceedings and concerns. No sin and wickedness, open or secret, would be practised under his roof; no drunkenness or intemperance would be seen; no profane or passionate language would be heard; angry tempers would be restrained, irreligious habits would be discontinued; the name of God would be reverenced, His sabbaths would be observed, His word would be honoured; the whole business of the household would be managed in another way, and upon different principles than was the case before this heavenly guest was admitted. All would work in their respective places, "not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God;" while a cheerful confidence in the power and promises of the Lord, and an encouraging sense

of His presence, compassion, and favour, would diffuse through every part of the family an air of tranquillity and contentment, which in a peculiar manner would mark and characterize it.

Such, we may presume, would be the effects produced in Obed-edom's family by the introduction of the ark of God. And in these particulars you may perceive the nature of family religion. Let Christ be received into our houses, and effects such as these will, in some degree at least, be produced; and will evince His powerful and gracious presence with us. In one particular, indeed, which I have not as yet expressly mentioned, we shall especially manifest His dwelling with us; namely, in the establishment of His worship in our house, in a daily social calling on His name by all the members of our household. It is by the regular performance of family worship that we make our habitations temples unto the Lord, and show that we have admitted His ark into our house. Indeed, unless this practice be observed, we can make no pretensions of this kind. It is by family worship that family religion is maintained. Wherever the patriarchs pitched their tents, there they "built an altar unto the Lord;" and when David had made an end of worshipping God in the congregation, he "returned to bless his household." Would

that this practice were constantly observed among all who name the name of Christ! It is to the too general disuse of it that much of the prevailing ungodliness among us is to be traced. If family religion abounded more, national irreligion would be much less; if every household were, in a measure, such as we have supposed Obed-edom's to have been when the ark of God was in it, how different would be the state of society! If every master and mistress of a family would come to the same holy resolution with the Psalmist, "Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me; he that walketh in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight," what a reformation would by degrees be effected in our population! If all our habitations were made temples unto the Lord, then indeed would glory dwell in our land, and "holiness would be inscribed on the bells of our horses!" Would, my brethren, that I could prevail with you who hear me, to admit, if you have not yet admitted, the ark into your families; to make your houses, houses of prayer, your habitations, habitations of God through the Spirit! Christ is ready to enter in and dwell with you. "Behold," says He, "I stand at the door and knock." Will you refuse Him

entrance? Will you say to Him, Depart from us? Shall your families any longer be reckoned among those which call not on His name, and which continue, like the heathen, barren and unblessed? I will not stop to reason with you on the *duty* of family religion; I will not point out the *obligations*, by which, with so many family mercies, and so many family wants, you are constrained daily to worship God in your families, and to praise Him and to pray to Him with all your household. I will merely take occasion from the example of Obed-edom to remind you,

II. Of the Profitableness of family religion.

Things are so appointed in the wisdom of God, that duty and interest are closely joined together. It is a truth, whether people will believe it or not, that the more attentive men are to their duty, the more real peace and happiness they will enjoy. Scripture tells us, that "godliness has the promise of the life that now is:" and reason, if we would listen to it, would tell us the same thing. It would tell us, that those persons must experience most real enjoyment, whom God regards with the greatest favour. The very habits and tempers, and dispositions which religion inspires, are those which of themselves tend most directly to produce comfort and happiness. Recollect what, as

I have shown you, would probably be the state of a family in which religion prevails. The tendency of family religion is to produce and diffuse throughout the household order and regularity, industry and fidelity, cheerfulness and good temper. And how greatly do these things promote real happiness! From how many causes of uneasiness and discomfort do they deliver us! Look into a family where there is no religion, and see what misery and wretchedness often arise from the want of it; from the allowed and habitual prevalence of those evil tempers, and bad passions, and ungodly practices, which religion would have restrained and prevented. Family religion also by inspiring a confidence in God, and a submission to His will and appointments, takes away, or at least very much lessens, many of those cares and anxieties about the conduct and success of worldly affairs, which so continually disturb the happiness of families into which the ark of God is not admitted.

But it is not in this indirect and incidental manner only that the profitableness of family religion shows itself. It is to be traced in its more immediate and practical effects. "The Lord *blessed* the house of Obed-edom, and all that pertained unto him, because of the ark of God." "The Lord *blessed* them." There was a peculiar mani-

festation of the Divine presence, favour, and protection, diffused around Obed-edom, and all that belonged to him. The power and goodness of God were, as it were, singularly exercised in his behalf. His own person, his children, his servants, his property, all bare marks of the superintending care of a kind and gracious Providence. We find the same things said in other parts of Scripture. Thus we read of pious Hezekiah, that "the Lord was with him, and that he prospered whithersoever he went." David, speaking of the good man, says, "Whatsoever he doeth, it shall prosper:" and again, "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways. For he shall eat the labour of his hands: happy shall he be, and it shall be well with him." And again, "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous; no evil shall befall him, neither shall any plague come nigh his dwelling." And Solomon states in a very striking and significant manner, the peculiar consequences which flow from the Divine blessing. "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich; and He addeth no sorrow with it." Surely we must allow, that it is *profitable* to have the ark of God in your houses, if it thus brings His blessing with it. He who blessed Obed-edom, and all that he had, because of the ark of God, is equally able and ready to

bless us, and all that we have; if, like him, we will consecrate our houses to be temples to God; and will fear, honour, and worship Him, in our families. He hath not said in vain, "Them that honour me, I will honour." "They that fear me are blessed." It is true, indeed, that the promises of the Christian dispensation are not temporal, but spiritual. They do not relate so directly to worldly blessings, as those did which were given under the Jewish law. They relate in fact to better things; things, which really are of more value to us, than the whole world. And therefore the promises of the Old Testament are not always to be understood by us in their full literal meaning; nor are we to expect that they will be literally fulfilled to us. But, notwithstanding these abatements, experience and observation abundantly prove, that the Lord even now *blesseth* the habitations of the righteous; and often encampeth round about them that fear Him, and the families that call upon His name. Would that all could be persuaded to try, and to admit the ark of God, and to set up an altar to Him in their houses! They would surely find the *Profitableness* of family religion; and God in many ways, in their souls and bodies, in their households and substance, would convince them that it is not a "vain thing" to serve

Him. How often do we hear masters and mistresses complaining of the conduct of their servants; of their disobedience, and disrespect, of their idleness and dishonesty! But what right, or what reason have they to complain of these evils, when they use not the means to prevent or cure them? If they teach not their domestics to fear and honour God, how can they expect that they will fear and honour *them?* If they do not accustom their households to serve God, how can they suppose that God will bless their services to *them?* And without His blessing how can their families flourish, or any thing they do be prospered? How frequently do we see the neglect of family religion punished in the misery, disgrace, and grief which the children bring upon their parents? When they grow up, and ought in the natural course of things to be a support and comfort to their fathers and mothers, they often prove to be the very reverse. Rebellious and unruly, without natural affection, insolent, and perhaps vicious; they become a trouble, a burden, and a shame to the families to which they belong. But where is the wonder, if such should be the case, when they have been accustomed to live without God in their families? When parents have thus omitted to render to God the glory due unto his name, where is the wonder, if

He make their children a curse to them instead of a blessing? As to Obed-edom, we have seen that the Lord blessed him, and his family; from which we might have inferred, that he was blessed in his children, even if we had no other means of ascertaining this fact. But we have other means. We find it mentioned in the twenty-sixth chapter of the first book of Chronicles, that many years after the circumstances stated in the text, Obed-edom was not only himself appointed to be a porter to the house of the Lord; but that he had eight sons, and six grandsons, of whom it is said, that they were "strong men, and mighty men of valour," serving in the same honourable office: and lest we should overlook the instruction which the seemingly incidental mention of this circumstance was designed to convey to us, it is expressly said, with an obvious reference to the particulars formerly recorded, "*for God blessed him.*" As if the Holy Spirit had bid us expressly to notice the comfort and happiness which Obed-edom had in his family, the honour to which his children were raised, and the qualities by which they were distinguished, as one part at least of that blessedness which had followed him, "because of the ark of God." I am aware, that in urging the importance of family religion, and of family worship as an essential part of

it, I shall encounter one very general and plausible objection. I shall be told by many that such a proceeding is not practicable: that it will interfere too much with the concerns of the house: that business must be done; and that where this is the case, a stated time for prayer cannot in such families be regularly maintained. But, my friends, there is no truth in this objection. Facts directly contradict it. There are families, in many kinds of business, which find time for the regular worship of God, without any of that inconvenience or interruption, which this objection supposes. Nay, far from experiencing any loss or hinderance from this practice, they find it to be profitable. The order and regularity, which it introduces into their households, is a real benefit to them, and proves in fact of essential service. Who, indeed, that thinks seriously, can for a moment retain a contrary opinion? Is it possible that any one can admit the ark of God into his house, and repent of having done so? Let me entreat you, let me persuade you, but to make the trial, and you will find, as others have found before you, that the difficulties you now anticipate will not exist. At first, perhaps, some little inconveniences may arise; but, if you set about the work in earnest, you will soon discover a way of overcoming them.

Oh! then, my brethren, let me beg you no longer to defer a practice which is urged upon you by so many considerations. May you this day resolve, in dependence on the grace of God, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." And may the Lord bless *you*, as He blessed Obed-edom, your houses, and all that pertaineth to you, "*because of the ark of God!*"

SERMON XIX

THE EVIL AND DESERT OF SIN INFERRED FROM THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST.

LUKE, xxiii. 31.

For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

THESE words were spoken by our blessed Saviour on a memorable occasion. It was at the very time, when having been falsely accused by the Jews, and unjustly condemned by the Roman governor; when having been treated with every indignity, scourged and crowned with thorns, He was now actually groaning under the weight and burden of that cross, on which, on His arrival at Calvary, He was to be barbarously crucified — it was at this time that He addressed himself to a great company of people and of women, which, following, bewailed and lamented Him, saying unto them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For, behold, the

days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us." In these words He warns them of those dreadful calamities which in a short time would fall upon the Jewish nation, and which would be so dreadful, that the prospect of them might well swallow up every other consideration, and engross the whole mind and apprehension of those who would be the victims of them. And then, as a proof and confirmation of his words, He subjoins those in the text. "*For* if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" The passage itself was probably proverbial; that is, it was a common saying, such as we have many among ourselves; the meaning of which is to be gathered from the way in which they are used, and from the subject to which they are applied. Jesus here brings this saying as a proof or reason of those dreadful calamities which were coming on Jerusalem; and in this use and application of it, its meaning is plain and obvious. Green wood is not in itself proper or suitable for the fire: it will not readily light, nor easily and freely burn. But dry wood is naturally inflammable: it will soon take fire, and will speedily blaze and burn.

By the *green tree* then, our Saviour here meant to describe Himself; by the dry wood, Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. He was himself without sin. His accusers had proved no crime against him. His Judge had pronounced Him innocent. With what propriety then, with what justice did He suffer the sentence of the law? He was no more a fit subject for punishment, than the green wood was a fit subject for the fire. But not such was the case with the Jewish people. They were a nation of wicked sinners, and deserved to suffer. They were now filling up the measure of their guilt, by this most flagrant act of injustice and cruelty. They were shedding innocent blood, under the very forms of law and justice. And in this respect they shewed themselves to be altogether "dry wood," fit for the burning; fuel prepared for the fire of wrath and vengeance. And "if these things then were done in the green tree, what would be done in the dry?" If the Romans, in the person of Pilate the governor, were now permitted of God to inflict such sufferings on the innocent and holy Jesus, what would be the sufferings, how dreadful, how tremendous, which they would shortly inflict on the Jewish nation, when they should come as the appointed instruments of divine vengeance on this incorrigible and devoted people?

Such was the way in which our Lord seems to have applied the proverbial saying in the text: and from this explanation we may perceive not only the meaning of the passage, but the propriety and force of the application.

This however is not the only way of understanding and applying the text. Our Lord, in putting this question, may be supposed to have suggested a consideration of a far more aweful kind, and of a far more general application, than the one which I have been hitherto explaining. By "the things which were done in a green tree," He might intend to signify all those complicated sufferings, in their nature, quality, and extent, which He underwent as the propitiation for our sins: and from the intenseness of these, considered with respect to the Person on whom they were inflicted, He might mean to suggest to us some idea of the exquisite nature of those sufferings to which the transgressors of God's holy law are justly exposed, and with which, if left to themselves, they must finally be visited. For, in this respect, they are but as "dry wood," fit only to be cut down and cast into the fire. A further and more detailed illustration of this view of the text will lead us to some very profitable considerations, and may therefore justly occupy our attention.

First, then, let me remind you that there was no natural connection between Jesus and suffering. He was no fit subject for the cruelty of man, nor for the displeasure of God. There was in Himself no reason why He should suffer at all. There was every reason why He should not suffer at all. For, in the first place, He was, as we have already observed, "without sin." And sin is the only just and legitimate cause for suffering. If there were no sin in the world, there would be no suffering in it. There is no suffering in heaven, for there is no sin there. There will be nothing but suffering in hell; for there will be nothing but sin there. And all the sufferings which men endure here are the consequences of sin. They are the *righteous* consequences of it: and if it were possible that there could be any man without sin, it would be an unjust and unrighteous thing that he should suffer. Suffering would have nothing to do with him. He would be naturally and necessarily exempt from it, as Adam was before he sinned. But Jesus Christ *was* without sin. Being miraculously conceived of the Holy Ghost, He was free from the original taint of our nature. He was a righteous man; holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. He perfectly fulfilled all righteousness; and never, in deed, in word, or in thought, trans-

gressed that holy law of God, to which, as man, He was subject. What then had *He* to do with suffering? Sooner might the "green tree" catch fire and blaze, than such a pure and perfect soul endure suffering.

But further, we have as yet taken only a very partial view of this matter. There is another consideration to be added, of higher moment, and of far deeper interest. Let us remember that Jesus was not only a holy, righteous, sinless man; He was something transcendantly more great and high: for He was God as well as man. In Him the two natures, divine and human, were intimately and wonderfully united. It was the Word that was made flesh—that Word who had been in the beginning with God, and was God. He it was, who was manifest in the flesh. He it was, who, being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God, but who yet was made in the likeness of man. It was the everlasting son of the Father—that Son who lay in His bosom; in whom He was well pleased; by whom he had made the worlds—that only-begotten and dearly-beloved Son, who was the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; —He it was, this great, this glorious, this divine Being, who appeared in our nature, and took on Him the form of a servant. He it was, who, uniting himself to the man Jesus

in a mysterious way, which we attempt not to explain, became God and man in one Christ: "God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; man, of the substance of his mother, born in the world" —perfect God, and perfect man, yet not two, but one Christ. "Without doubt," says the apostle St. Paul, "great is the mystery of godliness; God manifest in the flesh." And what then had a person, thus constituted, to do with suffering? What could He have to do with it? Shall that body and soul which were thus taken into the Godhead, and intimately united with the divine nature, be subject to pain and sorrow? Shall God inflict suffering, as it were, upon Himself? Shall the Almighty Father grieve and wound his dearly-beloved Son? Shall the only-begotten of the Father drink of a bitter cup, and endure grief, suffering wrongfully? Impossible might we have deemed such things. Impossible we must have deemed them, did not we know that they have actually occurred. Jesus, the Holy One of God; Jesus, the Son of the Most High; Jesus, God over all, blessed for evermore, *has suffered.* He has drank the bitter cup. He has endured pain, and shame, and grief. Whatever the cruelty or malice of men and devils could inflict, He has undergone. He has even died —died

by a death the most vile and painful of all deaths, the death of the cross. Nay, what far exceeds even all this suffering, it has pleased the Father Himself to bruise Him, and to put Him to grief, and to afflict Him in the day of His fierce wrath. This, my brethren, is a most deep and aweful subject; one which we cannot comprehend and fathom. But we read that the pure and spotless soul of Jesus was troubled; was heavy; was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. We are told that He was "in an agony." We find Him praying earnestly against the bitter cup which He was required to drink. We hear Him complaining of His Father's conduct towards Him, and grievously lamenting the inward desertion, darkness, and consternation, which He felt, saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—But what a mystery is all this to us! How can we reconcile these things? Does Jesus, the holy Jesus—does Jesus, the Son of God, endure these sufferings? Can we give any reason for so strange a sight? Can we account for so wonderful an event? Can we assign any cause why the fire should thus fasten and feed on the "green tree?" Yes, my brethren, we *can* answer these questions. We *can* state *why* Jesus suffered; *why* the Father bruised Him; *why* his soul was in trouble, in an agony. He stood in

the place of sinners. He took on Him their nature, that He might put Himself in their stead, and might make his soul an offering for their sins. He had no sin of his own, but sin was imputed to Him; it was set to his account; it was laid upon Him: and therefore He was dealt with as a sinner. Therefore He suffered. Therefore He drank the bitter cup, and tasted in his inmost soul whatever of wrath, and curse, and horror, it were possible that his holy, guiltless nature could experience. This is the plain and scriptural account of this transaction. "He who knew no sin, was made sin for us."— "He suffered the Just for the unjust."— "He bare our sins in his own body on the cross." — "He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities." — "He was made a curse for us," and "bare the sin of many."

And now, let us see the force and propriety of the consideration suggested to us in the text. If such, so great, so profound, so aweful, were the sufferings of Jesus, when he stood only in the place of others; if this spotless Lamb of God endured such things, for no other reason but because the sin, which He himself had never committed, was imputed to Him, and charged to his account; if the wrath of God was thus displayed against his dearly-beloved Son, when

that Son had consented to make his soul an offering for sin — what, it may be asked, will be those sufferings, which sinners, who stand in their own place, and bear the burden of their own sins, will be compelled to endure? What will they have to bear, whose sins are put to their own account? How heavily will the wrath of God fall upon them; and with what inconceivable horror and dismay will it afflict their souls, when, in addition to all that darkness and desertion, that agony and grief, which Jesus felt, they shall be appalled with a lively consciousness of guilt, and a deep feeling of despair? "For if these things have been done in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" Not more fitted is the dry wood for the fire, than the guilty soul of the sinner is for punishment. Let a spark be applied to the former, and it will instantly take fire and blaze. Let the wrath of God but touch the latter, and such a flame will instantly be kindled, as will fill it with anguish and torment unspeakable. There will, indeed, be one difference, and a most momentous one, between the two cases: the dry wood will burn, and be consumed, and the fire will go out; but not so with the guilty soul. It will burn, but not be consumed. The fire that torments it, will be everlasting. The flame will never be quenched. The smoke

of its torment will ascend up for ever and ever.

Such is the awful consideration suggested by the text. Let me now point out to you some of those profitable reflections which arise from it: —

1. We may be reminded by this subject of the great evil of sin; how exceedingly sinful it is in itself; and how tremendously dreadful in its consequences. See what it cost the pure and holy Jesus, the beloved Son of God, when He undertook to make satisfaction for sin. The agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion, was the lowest price which would be accepted even at *His* hands, when He would satisfy the justice of God for the sins which He had voluntarily taken upon himself. Nothing but the blood, the precious blood of Him who was God as well as man, a Lamb without blemish, and without spot, could expiate the guilt of sin. Think of this solemn truth, this aweful fact, and then say, Is sin that light and trifling thing which men esteem it? Is it a matter of little consequence whether they sin or not? Is sin to be allowed, and tolerated, and practised, without thought and without fear? Shall men live in the habitual indulgence of their sinful passions, tempers, and desires, and not tremble for the consequences? See, my brethren, in the cross

of Christ the evil and desert of sin. If God spared not His own Son, when He bare the sins of others; think you that He will spare those, who shall bear their own sins? If His wrath thus burnt against the Son of His love, because He only represented the sinner, will it not smoke against sinners themselves who presumptiously live in sin, and by so doing defy at once His justice, and trample under foot the blood of His dear Son? — May these reflections sink deep into your heart! May they awaken in your conscience a recollection of the many sins which you may have yourselves committed, and of the little concern which the commission of them may probably have given you; and may they excite in you a serious apprehension of the consequences which await unpardoned sin! Remember, that the guilty, unpardoned sinner is only fuel for the unquenchable flames; a dry and withered tree, whose end is to be cast into the fire, and to burn for ever. O flee then from this wrath to come: for who can dwell with everlasting burnings? Seek the remission of the sins that are past, through that blood of the Saviour, which has been shed as a propitiation for them: and through his stripes let your wounded soul be healed. For,

2. We are here also reminded of this most comfortable truth, that there is forgiveness

with God, and plenteous redemption for every sinner who truly turns to Him, by faith in that Lamb which He has himself provided for a burnt offering. Why, my brethren, did the Father thus bruise, and grieve, and afflict his dearly beloved Son, but that having thereby satisfied His own aweful justice, and done honour to His broken law, He might be at liberty without any impeachment of His glorious character, to shew mercy to the chief of sinners, and to forgive and receive into His favour every transgressor who will honour Him, by believing in Jesus, as the all-sufficient ransom for his sins? Why were these things done in the green tree, but that the dry trees might be plucked as brands out of the fire, and saved from everlasting burnings? Yes, precious and glorious truth! "Christ has suffered, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." He has died that we might live. He has suffered, that we might escape suffering. He has endured the pains of the cross, that we might be delivered from the bitter pains of eternal death. And all, who with the heart believe in Him, shall taste the benefits of His death and passion. Their sins, though many, shall be blotted out: "though they be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." This, my

brethren, this is the Gospel which we preach unto you, remission of sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. O! make this blessing your own. By faith embrace this Saviour, and all which He has done, and suffered, and perfected, and promised, shall be yours. Believe on Him with the heart unto righteousness, and you shall receive "redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Nay, you shall receive more from Him than even forgiveness of sins; you shall receive from Him a heart to hate, and forsake, and renounce all sin; a heart to love, and to practise holiness. You shall become a new creature. Your nature shall be changed. The law of God shall be written in your heart. This is one of the fruits of Christ's sufferings; one of the blessings purchased by Him on the cross, and freely bestowed on all who come to Him. They are no longer *dry trees*, withered, barren, unfruitful; but they are made *green trees* — "trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified." Grafted by faith into the true vine, they shall receive from Him life, and sap, and fruitfulness; they "shall spread out their roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh; but their leaf shall be green, and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall they cease from yielding fruit." Bre-

thren, my heart's desire and prayer to God is, that you may all be partakers of this blessedness! that redeemed by the blood of Jesus from the guilt and from the power of sin, you may serve Him without fear, in righteousness and holiness before Him all the days of your life, and may experience in your souls the riches and fulness of His great salvation!

SERMON XX.

DESCRIPTION AND DANGER OF RELIGIOUS DECLENSION.

HEBREWS, x. 38.

But if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

THE great design of the Bible is to teach us the way to heaven; to point out to us the road, and to stir us up to choose it, pursue it, and persevere in it. To this end, it employs every argument, and all the means which may be likely to affect us and prevail with us. It invites, persuades, admonishes, and threatens; it addresses itself both to our hopes and fears, allures us by the glorious prize which it sets before us, and alarms us by the danger of coming short of it. The argument used in the text is of this latter kind. St. Paul admonishes those who have set out in the ways of godliness to beware how they turn back or loiter in them: — "If any man

draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." The words are a kind of quotation from the prophet Habakkuk, from whom the preceding verse and the beginning of this is taken. I say, *a kind* of quotation; because the Apostle gives not the exact words, but the sense of the Prophet: so that it is rather an interpretation of his meaning, or an inference drawn from it, than a quotation. We must remember, however, that it is an interpretation given by an inspired writer, who equally with the Prophet was moved by the Holy Ghost.

St. Paul had been encouraging the Hebrew Christians, to whom he was writing, to bear up under their heavy trials, and not by yielding to them, to cast away their confidence, which had great recompence of reward. But for this purpose, they would have great "need of patience, that after they had done the will of God, they might receive the promise." Nothing but a believing expectation of an end to their affliction, and an humble reliance on the power and truth of God to support them under it, could enable them to endure. And this, in fact, was the same lesson which the prophet Habakkuk had taught long before, when he had said that "the just shall live by faith." Faith in God is the only principle on which a patient continuance in well-doing can be

founded. Those who live the life of God, must live by faith. It is thus that the saints have always been supported and strengthened. They have lived by faith; and so living they have waited patiently for the promises of God, and in due time have enjoyed them. It has been the character of God's people in all times, that they have been patient, humble believers in His holy word. But the proud man is impatient, and unbelieving: under trials and afflictions, his language is, "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" And of such a one, therefore, says the Prophet, "Behold, his soul which is lifted up, is not upright in him." And hence the Apostle, in reference to the particular object which he had in view, (having reminded the Christians of the necessity of perseverance, and of their need to this end of faith and patience,) says to them, "But if any man," through want of these, through unbelief and impatience, "draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." — "*My soul;*" — that is the soul, not of the apostle, not of the prophet, but of *Him* in whose name they were speaking; whose aweful truths they were proclaiming: — "If any man draw back, *I the Lord* will have no pleasure in him."

From this general explanation of the text, I will now proceed to set before you two

things which it suggests for our consideration.

I. The Case of the person here supposed; and,

II. The aweful Threatning denounced against him.

I. The Case of the person here supposed is this. He is one, who having made some profession of religion and some progress in it, after a time draws back; either retracing his steps, or turning aside into some other path. The Case is two-fold: it supposes two things; and we will take them in order.

1. The person here meant is one who has made some professions of religion, and has taken some steps in it. This is plain from the description; for the very expression of *drawing back* implies, that there had been previously some advance. There is nothing said as to the *degree* of progress which may have been made, or as *to the length* of time during which it may have been made. These may be more or less, shorter or longer. All which is meant is, that there must have been *some* progress: the person of whom we are speaking must have advanced *some* steps in religion.

I will briefly mention *those* which may be considered as indispensably necessary to the Case before us.

First, he must have been convinced in his conscience and judgement of the truth and excellency of religion. No man will set out in the ways of God, without first being persuaded in his mind that they are the best and wisest which he can take. He feels, at the time, that his salvation is at stake; that the word of God points out to him the way to heaven, and that it is his wisdom, interest, and safety to walk in this way. Whoever among you, my brethren, have set out, as you suppose, on the road to heaven, have felt something of this kind: nothing would have prevailed with you to turn out of the broad road of destruction into the narrow way of life, unless you had felt persuaded that religion was a good thing, and that to be yourself religious was the wisest step which you could take.

Secondly, the person here supposed must not only have been convinced of the excellency of religion, but must have come to a resolution of choosing it for himself. Something of this kind must have passed in his mind: — 'I see that religion is the way to happiness: I see that there is no other way in which I can walk, if I would be safe and happy, both in this world and the next; and therefore I will choose this way for myself, and henceforth I will walk in it.'

You, who are now walking in this way, cannot you call to mind some such thoughts and purposes as these, when you first set out in it? Your conscience prescribed to you the course which you ought to take; your judgement approved, and your heart and will assented. 'Be the consequence what it may,' you said to yourself, 'I will serve the Lord.'

Thirdly, the person here supposed did actually enter on this way; he chose religion, and he followed it; he gave clear and practical evidence of the purpose which he had formed, and plainly shewed that he was in earnest. He now, for instance, renounced his old ways of sin; forsook his former sinful companions; sought out new acquaintances, and kept company with those who were seemingly leading a religious life. He now put on a more serious appearance, and sought his pleasures where he did not use to seek them. He was now regular and constant at the house of God, and in his observance of the Sabbath, and seemed to take delight in divine ordinances, and to derive profit from them.

This was the way in which he was walking; and by these marks he shewed that he had entered on a religious course. It is possible, indeed, that he might have advanced still further, and might have made a still more promising profession of Christianity;

but so far as I have described, we may suppose him certainly to have gone. Whatever might be the *degree* of his progress, or the *length* of time during which he made it, he certainly advanced as far as I have here represented, and made such a profession *at least* of a religious life and conduct. And this then is the first part of the Case supposed.

We now proceed to the second part.

2. The person of whom we are speaking, having walked for a longer or shorter time in the way described, is *now drawing back*. He is no longer advancing and going forward, as was formerly the case; he is no longer pressing on, as he once seemed to do; he has checked his course, nay, he does not even keep the ground which he had gained; he has retreated and gone backward; his conduct is so changed, and his course is become at least so doubtful that perhaps it is difficult to say whether he is in the way at all or not; or whether he has not left it, and is turned altogether into some other path. It is plain that religion has not now that strong hold on him which it once had. His judgement may remain the same; he may be as clearly convinced as he ever was of the excellence of religion; but his heart is not engaged in it as it used to be. His warmth is abated; he is become cool and comparatively

indifferent on the subject: at least, he does not strive and exert himself as he formerly did.

Now there are many causes which may have tended to produce this effect.

He has been deterred, perhaps, by the difficulties which *seemed* to stand in his way, and to oppose his progress; I say *seemed*, because if he had persevered he would have found that they would have yielded and have come to nothing. The mountains would have become plains. But he has given way to the natural slothfulness and irresolution of his mind, and from fear and timidity has gone back. O my brethren, where are the faith and courage of such a man? Unbelief has got possession of his heart, and has made him a coward in the ways of God.

Or perhaps he has been overcome by the persuasion and influence of worldly friends and relations. They have assailed him on every side, and by entreaties or reproaches have endeavoured to prevent his progress in the ways of God; and with what success the event has fatally shewn. They have prevailed upon him to desist from his purpose; till overcome by their assaults, he at first slackened his pace, and is now drawing back.

Or perhaps the world has ensnared him in another way. It has involved him in its

cares or pleasures, in its business or dissipations; and these, like thorns, have choked the good seed which was beginning to shoot, and have rendered it unfruitful. "The love of money, which is the root of all evil," has taken off his mind from the beauties and glories of religion, and has brought down his affections from heaven to earth: thus, in the language of the Prophet, he has "laden himself with thick clay;" and what is the wonder, if thus incumbered, he has drawn back in the path to heaven?

Or, to mention only one other cause, he has not watched against his favourite sin; he has not denied and mortified it; he has supposed it to have been subdued, but it has deceived him, and has insensibly gained ground upon him, and recovered its former hold. He has not been aware of its power over him; and thus it has gradually revived and entangled him, and at length induced him to draw back, when possibly he has had no suspicion of this being the case.

To make this part of the case, however, more plain, I will state to you some few of the particular symptoms which distinguish it.

When a person is drawing back in religion, he will discover his retrograde movement by many proofs, to those who know what religion is, and have the means of observing his conduct. It does not follow that

he will return exactly into the same paths in which he was walking before he appeared to become a religious character; but he will plainly shew that he is not now the same religious character which he lately was. He will insensibly become less correct in his conduct and conversation. He will not now be so careful of his company. He will be growing more shy of the society of religious persons, and more disposed to mingle with those of another kind. He will be continually making excuses, on the ground of worldly engagements, for neglecting the duties of religion, and the concerns of his soul. He will try to avoid close religious conversation, and to turn off the discourse, when it becomes searching and particular, to something of a more general tendency. He will gradually become less frequent and regular in his attendance on public ordinances; while the devotion and attention, that used to mark his behaviour there, are *too* visibly declining. If, in addition to these outward marks of declension, you were to follow this person home, and observe his conduct in private, you would see the Bible less frequently consulted, and religious duties less diligently performed. If you could, unseen, attend him into his chamber, or his closet, you would see him more seldom on his knees before a throne of grace; and when so en-

gaged, not fervent and urgent as in former days. Communion with God is no longer his delight and enjoyment. And if you could look into his heart, you would see this to be the case. You would see that his prayers are no longer spiritual, but formal; his mind no longer heavenly, but earthly; his thoughts no longer running out after, and rising up to God, but fixed and fastened to the world, and to the things of it. Thus fatally is he drawn back.

Such is the Case of the person supposed in the text. We now go on to consider,

II. The aweful Threatening denounced against him.

"If any man draw back." If there should be a person in the state that has been here described, what does the Lord declare respecting him? "My soul shall have no pleasure in him." We are told that the Lord does "take pleasure in His people." — "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him; in those that hope in His mercy." The meaning of which is, that He regards such persons with favour and complacency. He sees and approves their ways. He delights over them to do them good. He hath pleasure in their prosperity and happiness. He rejoices over them with joy; and will, in due time, fill them with joy unspeakable, and full of glory. But He hath no pleasure

in them that "draw back." He can take no delight in them. They are not the objects of his complacency and favour. He has no good, no happiness in store for them. He sees, but He cannot approve them. He knows their way, but He cannot rejoice over them to do them good. But further,

The expression in the text has a still more aweful and alarming sense than even this. It is a dreadful thing to be excluded from the favour and loving-kindness of the Lord; but it is a far more dreadful thing to be shut up under his displeasure and wrath. Yet such is the case with the person of whom we are speaking. Such is the real meaning of the text, "My soul shall have no pleasure in him." This is a way of speaking not uncommon in Scripture, when far more is implied than is actually expressed. For instance, when in the third commandment, it is said, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain:" it is here meant, that the Lord will hold such an offender exceedingly guilty: He will regard his offence as a very aggravated sin, and will punish him in a most exemplary manner. So, here in the text, when it is said, that the Lord will have no pleasure in them that draw back, what is meant, but that far from having pleasure in such characters, He will greatly

hate and detest them; will hold them in peculiar abhorrence, and will make them the especial objects of his wrath and vengeance? No persons are so offensive to Him as those, who, having for a time walked in His ways, at length draw back. For such conduct is the greatest affront, and most direct indignity which can be offered to God. It intimates, that His ways do not prove, on trial, such as in expectation they promised to be. It implies, that His word is false, that His commandments are grievous, and that communion with Him is not worth retaining. The man who draws back does in a manner say, that the ways of sin and of the world are preferable to the ways of religion; that having tried the latter, and found them fail, he now returns to the former, as being those in which most pleasure and profit are to be found. Can any thing be more insulting to God, than such an imputation? Can any thing be more dishonourable to Jesus Christ, or shew a greater contempt of His mercy and grace? And what recompense can such a person expect, but a fearful looking for of judgement and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries? "For of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who has thus trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of

the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace?"—"It had been better for him," says St. Peter, "not to have known the way of righteousness, than after he hath known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto him." It had been *better* for him. His guilt and his punishment would have been less. He will surely find in the end, the full meaning of the threatening in the text, "My soul shall have no pleasure in him."

From this discussion of the subject, I shall now make a short application, and address three kinds of persons. And,

1. Those who have entered, as they suppose, on the paths of religion, and are now walking in them. My brethren, if this be really your state, and you are indeed walking in the narrow way that leadeth unto life, I do most sincerely congratulate you, and would call on you to praise the Lord for his goodness, who hath thus made you to differ from your former self, and having delivered you from the broad road of destruction, has brought you into new paths. But suffer a word of exhortation. Take heed that ye draw not back. To this end "be watchful and sober;" and look to yourselves, that ye "lose not those things, which ye have

wrought." There are some directions, in reference to this point, which I would especially set before you.

First, deeply impress your mind with the aweful state of those who do draw back. Consider how great is their sin, and how imminent their danger. And remember, that *their* sin and their danger may be *yours*. "Be not high minded, but fear." Such a fear will be one of the most probable means, under God, of keeping you from drawing back. He promises, that he will put his fear into the hearts of his people, that they may not depart from Him. Seek of Him *this fear*: — pray that He will put it into *your* heart. Avoid self-confidence, and self-conceit. Pride goeth before a fall. Those who would walk safely, must walk *humbly*. The Lord will guide and keep the *meek*.

Secondly, watch against the sin that most easily besets you, — the sin of your nature; the sin, to which from temper or constitution, from your situation or your habits, you are most addicted, and most exposed. This sin may seem to be subdued: while it is only waiting to deceive and draw you back. It is this sin, which you have most reason to dread: for it is the last which will be overcome. It will be continually striving to recover possession of your heart; and by little and little, without your perceiving it, to regain the

ground which it has lost. Watch and pray, then, against this sin.

Thirdly, be regular and fervent in private prayer, and in secret communion with God. This is the life and source of religion in the soul. Here it must be maintained and kept alive; and it is here that every declension in religion begins. No man ever drew back, who did not first become cold and remiss, and formal in the private duties of religion. If you do not habitually pray to God in secret, you can have no real religion at all. And if you are beginning to grow cold and careless in this point, be assured that religion is losing ground in your heart. Here then be vigorous, and make a stand. Keep up the practice and the spirit of prayer; and your "light will shine more and more unto the perfect day."

Fourthly, if you would not draw back, go forwards. In this course you cannot stand still. If you are not gaining ground, you are losing it. If you do not advance, you are in fact retreating. Persevere, then, in the ways of godliness. Strive through the grace which is in Christ Jesus to gain more victories over self and the world. Press towards the mark; grow in grace, add one Christian virtue and temper to another, so will your progress be clear and certain: your calling and election will be made sure.

2. I would address those who in their hearts may be conscious, at least fearful, that they have drawn back. O my unhappy brethren, after the view which has been given in this discourse of such a state, I need not point out to you your sin and danger; but I would earnestly intreat you to lay to heart what has been said on this subject, and to reflect with yourselves on your present aweful state. Consider from whence you are fallen. You had escaped from the bondage of Satan, sin, and the world, and were walking in the way to heaven: but now you are again entangled and overcome; and hell, it is to be feared, must be your portion for ever. A double guilt, a double condemnation lie upon you. Will not these considerations rouse you? Will they not awaken you, before it is yet too late, to rise and retrace your steps? If you will now arise, it is not yet too late to regain the ground you have lost. The Lord is very merciful. He still says to you, "Return ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Reflect on the mercy of this invitation; beware how you despise and reject it to your own destruction; beware, lest the Almighty swear in His wrath, that you shall never enter into His rest: for "He is a jealous God, a consuming fire."

3. I would, in conclusion, address another

class, — those who perhaps may be saying to themselves; 'We are free from this 'charge. We have never made any particular 'profession of religion, so that we cannot be 'said to have renounced it. We are at least 'no hypocrites. God cannot accuse us of 'having drawn back from his ways.' I know that persons have in this way reasoned on this subject, absurd and impious as such reasoning is. And, therefore, if there should be any persons of this kind present, I would ask them, whether they seriously think that avowed irreligion is to be defended in this way? Because you are not hypocrites, and have made no pretensions to religion, shall you escape the judgement of God? Why have you *not* made pretensions to religion? Why have you *not* taken up a serious profession of religion? Why have you lived to this time in sin and ungodliness, walking in the broad road of destruction? Be assured, that so long as you are in this state, the Lord hath no pleasure *in you.* He abhors ungodliness and sin, and both hates and will punish all the workers of iniquity. Repent, I beseech you, of your great wickedness, and turn unto the Lord your God. Strive to enter in at the strait gate, for destruction and misery are in your present paths. There is a wrath revealed from heaven, and coming on all those who

hold the truth in unrighteousness. O flee from this wrath, lest it suddenly overtake you, and plunge your soul into unspeakable misery! Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?

SERMON XXI.

THE LORD'S PEOPLE COMFORTED.

ISAIAH, xl. 1.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

WITH this chapter, and with these words does Isaiah begin that portion of his book which peculiarly entitles him to the name of the Evangelical Prophet. Throughout the preceding part there had been many predictions relating to the times of the Gospel, and many passages full of its precious truths. But here he enters on one continued discourse, in which the Prophet himself no longer appears, but in which one great theme, with the subjects connected with it, alone occupies his pen, namely, "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." Throughout the twenty succeeding chapters, Christ and His Gospel are the grand objects which He almost exclusively brings before

his readers. And these are the words in which He enters on this discourse, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God;" words peculiarly suited to that dispensation of mercy which the Gospel reveals, and descriptive of its office and tendency. We may observe that they are the words of the Lord, addressed to His prophet; and not to that prophet only, but to all His prophets, and to all His ministers in every age, directing them to the discharge of a most important part of their duty, — the ministering to His Church that consolation which His Gospel so abundantly supplies, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people."

In an humble endeavour to discharge, on the present occasion, this part of the minister's duty, I shall proceed,

I. To make some Observations on the injunction in the text. And

II. So far as I may be able to comply with it.

I. We may observe, in the first place, that God has a people in the world. This truth we may infer from the text: for He there calls them *His* people. "Comfort ye *my* people;" a people who in a peculiar manner belong to Him, and whom He distinguishes from others, and esteems and values before them. And who are these?

In one sense, all those whom the Lord in His wisdom and mercy designs to create anew by His Holy Spirit, and, who, though at present afar off, will in His appointed time be brought nigh by the blood of the Cross, and the preaching of the Gospel: all these, in one sense are *His* people. Thus, when the Lord would cheer and animate His discouraged Apostle at Corinth, He exhorted him not to fear, but to speak; adding as a reason, "For *I have* much people in this city." Though at the time they were living in idolatry and sin, yet with a prospective view to their future conversion, the Lord speaks of them as *His*. "I *have* much people in this city;" an assurance greatly calculated, beyond all doubt, to revive the spirits, and encourage the efforts of His faithful but dejected minister.

My brethren, it is a similar hope which supports and animates the ministers of Christ in the present day. When they often see but little fruit in proportion to their wishes, to the seed which they have sown, and to the cultivation which they have bestowed, they are preserved from despondency by the hope that the Lord may yet have some people in their congregations; some whom, in His good time, He will graciously call according to his purpose; some whom He will lead by a way that they know not, into paths which they

have not known; who, though now erring and straying like lost sheep, will yet one day be gathered to the fold; and whom, therefore, the Lord, "who calleth those things that be not as though they were," may, in this sense, call even now His people.

These, however, are not the persons of whom He expressly speaks, under this title in the text. For these persons cannot at present be known or addressed as His people; neither at present are they capable of being comforted, according to the direction here given. Before *they* can partake of the consolations of Christianity, they must awake out of sleep; they must be roused by the trumpet of the Gospel from the death of sin; they must hear the voice of the Son of God, speaking to them by His word; convincing them of sin, and leading them anxiously to enquire, "What must we do to be saved?" Before *they* can *receive* the comfort of the Gospel, they must *desire* the comfort of it. And how great a change in their mind and dispositions does this supposition imply! Persons who are living in sin, satisfied with the pleasures and pursuits of this world, and fearlessly relying on their own merits and righteousness, cannot possibly know any thing of *divine* comfort; they cannot taste it; they cannot desire it; they cannot comprehend it. Before they can do these things,

they must be partakers of a divine nature; they must be born from above; they must be spiritually minded; they must in their hearts have fled to Jesus Christ for refuge from the wrath to come; and must be earnestly desiring to live by faith in Him, and to walk in newness and holiness of life. And such then are the Lord's people. They may not take to themselves this title; they may put it away from them, as feeling that they are unworthy of it; but He who sees and knows their true state and character, esteems and calls them such. It is of such He speaks in the text; and speaking of them, He calls them *His* people. And this leads me to another Observation suggested by the text, namely,

That God would have these, His people, to enjoy the comforts of religion. To this end He says to His ministers, "*Comfort* ye, *comfort* ye my people."

There is in religion a rich fund of consolation sufficient for the people of God. Be their causes of discomfort what they may, they may yet find in the Gospel an ample remedy. And the Lord would have them to find it. He would not have them to be a sorrowful and dejected people. If they are such, it is not the consequence of their religion, as worldly and ungodly persons often represent it to be. It is either because they

have too little religion, or because they know not how to use and apply the religion which they have. They do not derive from the Gospel the consolations which it provides, nor understand how to live up to the privileges which it confers on them. They mistake its nature and tendency; indulge their own views of it; and thus miss the peace and comfort, which they might derive from it; and which, as we here see, it is intended that they should derive from it. In fact, while the people of God are disconsolate; while they refuse to be comforted, or, which is nearly the same thing, while they fail of obtaining that consolation, which they might enjoy, they do little or no credit to the religion which they profess; they furnish a handle to those who would speak evil of it as a dull and melancholy pursuit; and fail themselves in discharging the duties which it imposes on them. For the mind which is disturbed and weakened through want of inward peace and comfort, cannot be properly braced and fitted for active duty.

On these accounts, then, it is particularly desirable that the people of God should be taught to lay aside all unnecessary and unreasonable fears; to divest themselves of all groundless causes of uneasiness; and to "rejoice in Christ Jesus." And hence (it may be further observed) the propriety and

importance of the injunction in the text result. The preachers of the Gospel are required to direct their attention and their teaching to these points; and to consider it as an essential part of their office to minister, so far as they may be able, to the people of God that consolation which belongs to them, and which they are capable of receiving. "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God." The repetition of the command intimates the urgency with which it is enjoined, and the diligence and faithfulness with which it should be executed.

With these Observations on the injunction in the text, I proceed,

II. So far as I may be able, to comply with it.

To this end I will endeavour to obviate some few of the most common causes of that want of comfort, to which the people of God are liable. May He bless my endeavours to their peace and consolation!

1. One cause of their want of comfort is their misunderstanding the nature and extent of that pardon of sin, which the Gospel provides.

They have been reclaimed, we may suppose, from a sinful and worldly course. They once, for a longer or a shorter period, lived an ungodly life, and were only treasuring up wrath, as too many do, against the day of

wrath. But now, through the grace and mercy of the Gospel, having been redeemed from their former vain conversation, they are walking in newness of life. Convinced of their guilt and peril as sinners, they have indeed fled to Christ, are trusting solely in His mercy, and are living by faith in Him. But in the mean time they do not enjoy all the comfort to which this state of things entitles them. The recollection of their former sins, committed in the days of their ignorance and impiety, is very painful to them. It often overspreads their minds, like a thick cloud, and fills them with darkness and alarm. The burden of their guilt is a heavy yoke under which they groan. They are not indeed without a hope that they shall obtain forgiveness *at last;* and that, when they come to be judged, God will pardon them for Christ's sake. But still they are at times much depressed with doubt and apprehension. They cannot but think within themselves, 'What if God should *not* par-'don me at last? I have done very much in 'times past to displease and anger Him. 'There is a long black catalogue of sins to 'be brought against me. I must be afraid, 'till such time as they are pardoned.'

Now, my brethren, if there should be any of you who think and feel thus, let me assure you that there is comfort, abundant

comfort for you, if you have but grace and faith to apply it. Your fears and troubles really arise from your not having a clear and distinct view of the nature and blessings of the Gospel. The Gospel does not offer you a pardon at some distant day; it offers to forgive you *now:* nay, it tells you, that if you have in your heart come to Jesus Christ and believed in Him, your sins *are already* forgiven you. It is this truth which forms a peculiar feature in the religion of Christ, namely, that "there *is* no condemnation to them that are in Him." Their sins *are* blotted out:—they *are* remitted. God is said to have even put them out of His remembrance: and He would have you so put them out of *your* remembrance also, as not to be harassed and agitated by an apprehension of punishment on account of them. You cannot indeed but recollect them, and recollect them with sorrow and shame; and this recollection will be profitable to you: but you need not, and you ought not to recollect them with fear and terror, as if the guilt of them still lay upon you, and might yet be visited upon you. For has not Christ borne them in His own body on the tree? Was he not "set forth as a propitiation through faith in His blood, for the remission of sins that are past?" Is it not said, that His "blood cleanseth from all sins," and that "all who

believe in Him are justified freely by His grace?" Did He not himself say to the poor woman, who had been a sinner, "Thy sins *are* forgiven thee; go in peace?" My dear disconsolate brethren, I wish you to see and understand this point distinctly, that you may have all peace and joy in believing.

The salvation of the Gospel is a *present* salvation. The pardon vouchsafed in it is a *present* pardon. The peace to be enjoyed through it, is a *present* peace. When the prodigal returned home a penitent to his father's house, how was he treated? Was he not at once most kindly received and welcomed? Were not his offences fully and instantly forgiven, and his self-reproaches stopped? Was he not treated in every respect as a son, who, though he had been lost, was now found? Was he told, amidst all the pleasures of the feast provided for him, that he must not enjoy himself *too much*, for that perhaps his father might some years hence remember his past misconduct, and visit it upon him? An apprehension of this kind would doubtless have much diminished his comfort: but would it not also have been groundless and unreasonable? Equally groundless and unreasonable are your apprehensions; if having come to Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you yet fear that in the end you may be punished for them, and so load yourself with

a burden which He has carried for you, and from which He died to free you. Take, I beseech you, the comfort which these truths inspire. Dispel your doubts:—lay aside your fears. Rejoice in the assurance that "God is in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them:" and that "Whosoever believeth in the Son is not condemned, but hath everlasting life."

2. Another cause of want of comfort to the people of God arises from their seeking it where it is not to be found. It is one of their privileges as true Christians, that they are renewed in the spirit of their minds; but this renewal is not, and cannot be at present perfect. They are renewed but in part, consequently, they have the seeds of corruption still remaining in them; and too often putting forth vigorous shoots. The old man, though mortified, is not subdued: the flesh, though crucified, is not as yet dead, and not unfrequently renews the struggle, and tries for mastery. Sin, thus dwelling in them, still cleaves to every thing which they do, so that nothing as yet is perfect in them. It intrudes even into their most holy things, and the most sacred places and duties cannot exclude or prevent its motions in the heart; and this is often a source of bitter trouble to the people of God. They grieve to find a

law in their members still warring against the law of their minds. They are distressed and perplexed at the conflict in their own soul. When they would do good, evil is present with them: and though in their minds and judgements they abhor sin, and pray and strive against it, yet they lament to find it still working in their hearts, and like an impure fountain continually casting up mire and dirt. And what is often the effect of this state of things? They draw from it very unfavourable conclusions respecting their spiritual state, and walk very uncomfortably in their own minds. 'If we were 'the people of God (they ask), would it be 'thus with us? Should we feel these things? 'At any rate, while such is our inward 'depravity, it is impossible that we can ex-'perience any of the comforts of religion, 'or possess any title and pretensions to its 'peace and consolations. If we could see 'this lust *completely* eradicated, or this evil 'propensity *utterly* subdued, or this vile 'temper for *ever* suppressed, then indeed we 'might take comfort; then indeed we should 'be growing in grace, and might rejoice in 'God our Saviour. But till something of 'this kind take place in our hearts, it would 'be presumption in us to have peace and 'joy; and we must be content to mourn and 'bear our cross.'

Now, my brethren, I would appeal to some of you who hear me, whether I have not described the cause of your uneasiness, and have touched the secret spring of your spiritual trouble. But let me remind you, if you answer this description, that you are seeking for the comfort of the Gospel, where it can never be found, even in yourself. Upon the principle on which you are acting, you never can find it, so long as you are in the body. If you are never to partake of the peace and consolations of Christianity, so long as you fall short of the spiritual standard of obedience, you must go mourning all your days: for the more spiritually minded you grow, the more spiritual will that standard become in your estimation, and consequently the more unholy will you appear in your own eyes. But, I repeat it, that in acting thus, you are looking for comfort to a quarter from whence it never can come. You never can find it, from poring into your own hearts. You must look to something out of yourself. You must look in faith to Jesus Christ. It is from the contemplation of his glorious person and gracious offices: it is from the consideration of His perfections, of His power and mercy, of His faithfulness and truth: it is from reflecting on what He is in Himself; on what He has done for you; on what He is doing for you, and has promised

and pledged Himself to do for you; — it is from looking at these things, that you must obtain comfort, and experience the consolations of religion. You must go out of yourself, and take your eyes off from yourself, and must go and look unto Jesus, if you would rejoice in Him. Peace and joy come *by believing*. Christ is the only source of all consolation to the soul: and if you wanted light, would you expect to find it by looking downwards on the ground, or upwards to the sun? Would the Israelite when bitten by the serpents, have found any relief or assuagements of his pain by meditating on his wounds, and lamenting the violence and deadly nature of his disease? No: it was by *looking* on the serpent of brass, that he found a cure, and had his heart filled with hope and joy. See here, my brethren, where *you* must learn to rejoice; whence alone *you* can receive consolation. Look unto Jesus: think of His fulness and sufficiency, and let the sense of remaining corruption, while it increases your humility and excites you to watchfulness and prayer, constrain you more entirely to rejoice in *Him*, who hath redeemed you to God by His blood; who knoweth your frame, and is touched with the feeling of your infirmities, and will one day "present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

3. Another cause of want of comfort in the people of God arises from their mistaking the proofs and marks of a really religious state. They suppose that it consists in warm and rapturous feelings; that it is closely connected with certain strong impressions, and lively emotions, communicated to the soul; and because they find none of these things in themselves, they are therefore dejected, and refuse to be comforted. 'If we 'were the Lord's people,' they mournfully exclaim, 'we should *feel* it in our hearts. 'He would warm us and cheer us by His 'presence: our joy would be full: our cup 'would run over.' And where, my brethren, have you been taught these things? Who has told you that such would be the proofs of a truly religious state? I am sure that you have not learnt this doctrine from the Bible, for the Bible tells you nothing of this kind. It never bids you judge of your religious state by your own feelings; and in fact, as there is no mark more unscriptural, so there is none more unsafe, than this would be. For what are called *religious feelings* are often nothing more than natural and constitutional excitements, and sometimes even mere delusions, the effect of sympathy, or of Satan. And hence we so often find that those persons, who trust to their feelings as proofs of their Christianity, endure only for

a time, and probably for a short time, and then fall back again into a state of irreligion. It is not possible for feelings to be long wound up to one high pitch; and when these fail with the persons of whom I am speaking, then their religion fails too. They become cold and heartless, and having no root in themselves, they speedily wither away. The religion of such characters is like a bundle of thorns on fire:- for a little time there is noise and light, and some measure of heat; but presently the flame subsides, the fire goes out, and all is dark and chill. Are you, then, one of those who have fallen into this mistake; who are ready to conclude that you are not a child of God, because you do not *feel* that you are one? I beseech you to lay aside this unscriptural notion: there is no foundation for it in the word of God, which alone is truth. You are there told, that you are to walk not by sight, but by faith; and if by faith, then not by feeling: the promises are made not to feeling, but to faith. St. Paul did not say to the jailer who asked what he must do to be saved, '*Feel* 'that you have Christ in your heart, and 'you shall be saved;' but he said to him, "*Believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Are you humbly believing in Jesus Christ as your only Saviour from sin and wrath, casting all your care, and

burden, and hope, upon Him? In a dependance on the divine promises, and in a faithful use of the means of grace, are you doing the duties of your respective station, living in the fear of God, and seeking daily to please, serve, and honour Him, as your reconciled God and Father in Christ Jesus? Are you wilfully allowing no sin, habitually indulging no lust, no evil temper, no ungodly disposition? Are you walking in Christian holiness, cultivating a spirit of peace and love in yourself and others, doing good to your neighbours, so far as you have opportunity, both in body and soul? Have you these proofs and marks of a truly religious state? Then are you one of the Lord's people, and may justly take to yourself the comforts of Christianity. They belong to you. Receive them in faith. Regard not your frames and your feelings. Be not discouraged, because you cannot find in yourself *this* feeling or *that* feeling. Rejoice in the *Lord;* believe His promises, because they are *His.* Abraham against hope believed in hope. He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief. He had nothing but the bare word of the Almighty on which he could confide. But what other ground of confidence could he desire? You have the same word, confide in *that.* See what is written, "He that believeth on the

Son hath everlasting life." *You* believe on Him: therefore *you* have everlasting life. What you may *feel* is nothing to the purpose. Your salvation is grounded on the faithfulness of Him who cannot lie. It does not rest on the changeable feelings of a frail and mutable creature. It is fixed on the Rock of ages, on the stability of Him who cannot lie. Here is comfort for you: real, substantial, permanent consolation. May you have grace from above to receive, apply, and appropriate it! May this attempt, however imperfect, to comply with the injunction in the text of comforting the Lord's people, be followed by His blessing! and may you, my brethren, to whom this comfort belongs, richly experience it, both now and ever, for Jesus Christ's sake!

SERMON XXII.

THE CHRISTIAN CHALLENGE.

ROMANS, viii. 31.

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

IT has been well remarked by an able and eminent commentator, that 'if St. Paul ever 'rode in a triumphant chariot on this side 'heaven,' it was when inditing the passage of which these words are the commencement: 'with such a holy height and bravery of 'spirit, with such a fluency and copiousness 'of expression,' does he here comfort him-'self, and all the people of God, upon the 'consideration of their great and glorious 'privileges.' These privileges the Apostle had been describing in the former part of the chapter; when he thus proceeds to close this admirable discourse, with a holy triumph in the name of all the saints. "What shall we then say to these things?" The Apostle speaks as one amazed, and, as it were, swal-

lowed up with admiration of the exceeding great and precious truths which he had been detailing; wondering at "the height and depth, the length and breadth, of the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."—"What shall we say to these things?" What inference, what conclusion shall we draw from them? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" That God *is* for us, is a truth which all the previous statements and arguments had abundantly proved: and this point being once established, it might indeed be exultingly asked, "*Who* can be against us?"

Here, then, is a challenge made, a defiance given to all the enemies of our salvation. And in discoursing on this passage, let us consider,

I. The Ground of this Challenge.

II. The Challenge itself.

O may the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, help us to understand, to receive, and to apply the precious truths and consolations, which the consideration of these two points will bring before us!

I. The Ground of the Challenge here made is this, that "God is for us," words of a most extensive and important meaning: in explaining which, it will be desirable, first, to point out the persons in whose behalf the Apostle here speaks, and gives the challenge

in question. When he says, "God is for us," whom does he intend to signify by the word *us?* He evidently means *true Christians*, among whom he humbly ranked himself; and of whom he had given a description in the preceding part of the chapter, by several different intimations scattered throughout it. He had represented them, in the first verse as those, who "are in Christ Jesus, and who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit;" in another place, as those, in whom the "Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwelleth;" who "are led by the Spirit," and "through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body." In a few verses after, he describes them as those, who "suffer with Christ, that they may be also glorified together;" and who now "groan within themselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of their bodies:" while in the passage immediately preceding the text, he had spoken of them as those, who "love God, who are the called according to His purpose; whom having foreknown, He had predestinated to be conformed to the image of the Son, and whom He had called, justified, and glorified." These are clearly the persons, the true people and children of God, in whose name and on whose behalf St. Paul makes the challenge in the text; and in respect of whom, he lays down this

most important position, that "*God is for them.*" The expression of being *for* a person implies the being *on his side*, the taking *his part;* and it intimates, that the person in question is engaged in some conflict, or exposed to some difficulties, and stands in need of assistance, co-operation, or support.

And this is eminently the case with the people of God. They are engaged in a most arduous conflict; they are exposed to very serious difficulties. Weak and defenceless in themselves, they are utterly unable to overcome the many powerful obstacles and enemies which stand in the way of their salvation. They have a great work on their hands, the safety and happiness of their immortal souls. But in the prosecution and attainment of this object, they are greatly opposed. The devil, the world, and the flesh, are set against them; and they have no might or strength of their own to cope with these formidable adversaries.

But, says the Apostle in the text, "God is for them;" He is on their side; He takes their part; He co-operates with them; undertakes their cause, and proclaims Himself their ally.

This, indeed, was not always the case: the time was, when instead of being *for* them, He was *against* them; when, instead of being their friend and ally, He was their enemy

and opponent. This was when they were not in *Christ;* when in their natural and unrenewed state they followed the world, and walked after the flesh, and consequently were the willing servants of the Prince of Darkness. This was once their state; for it is naturally the state of all the children of Adam, who are born in sin, and are the children of wrath; and at this time, then, and in this state, this state of sin, and guilt, and unbelief, being enemies to God by wicked works, He was not, as I have observed, *for* them, but *against* them; not their friend and ally, but their enemy and opponent.

But the case is otherwise now, when the Apostle speaks of them. They are in different circumstances from those, in which they formerly were; they are now "in *Christ Jesus;*" they are become "new creatures;" they have left the service of Satan; they have renounced the world and the flesh; they have come to Jesus Christ for help and deliverance; they have with the heart believed on His name, and embraced His salvation; they are now united to Him, and led by His Spirit: and what is the consequence of this blessed and glorious change in their condition and character, but that "God is FOR them?" He is no longer their enemy; He no longer opposes them, and regards them with displeasure. On the contrary, He is at peace

with them; He is reconciled to them; nay more, He is become their friend, their ally, their protector; He has espoused their cause; He has undertaken their defence; He has declared Himself on their side.

But there is another light in which this expression in the text may be viewed, and its meaning explained. God may be said to be *for* His people, not only as an ally and a protector, but also in His character and capacity of Judge. He is the great Judge of all the earth; and according to His decision and sentence the everlasting state of every individual will at last be settled. But He is "*for* His people:" He has already pronounced their acquittal, and has proclaimed Himself on their side, against every accuser.

This, again, is another consequence of their being *in Christ*. By nature and by practice they were sinners, and stood exposed to the righteous judgment of God; and had they continued impenitent and *out of Christ*, they would most certainly have incurred the aweful condemnation of His law. But now, having fled to Christ, and by faith being sprinkled with His atoning blood, they have received a pardon; their sins are forgiven them; they will not come into condemnation: for "there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." The Judge Himself is *for* them, and has already decided in their

favour. Accepting the sacrifice of His own dearly-beloved Son as a full satisfaction for their sins, He absolves them from every charge; and, regarding them in their union with Christ as forming a part of His mystical body, He views them only as covered with His righteousness; imputes His obedience to their account; and thus, for His sake, pronounces them righteous, and deals with them as such. He "justifies them freely by His grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

There is yet another way in which this important truth may be explained.

God is "*for* His people." Being one with Christ, united to Him by a living faith, all the perfections and attributes of God are engaged on their side, and pledged to secure their everlasting happiness. For instance; the *mercy* of God is "*for* them." The Lord delighteth in mercy: it is His favourite attribute. When He made known His name to Moses, He proclaimed Himself "the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin." But this mercy He cannot exercise towards those who are *not* in Christ, towards impenitent and unbelieving sinners. His truth and holiness, and the honour of His Law forbid it. But to those who are "in Christ" no prohibition of this

kind attaches. They have an interest in the blood of Jesus, which cleanseth from all sin. To *them*, therefore, the Divine mercy freely reaches: there is nothing to prevent its richest, largest exercise. Loosed from every restraint, it flows to them in richest streams of love and pity, and delightest over them to do them good. Again,

The *justice* of God is *for* His people.

This attribute was originally *against* them. As transgressors of the Law of God, it threatened them with vengeance, and demanded punishment of them. But Christ, by suffering for them, has answered this demand. As their surety, He was delivered for their offences, and paid their debt to the very last farthing, till He could truly say, "It is finished." That justice, therefore, which was once against them, now is *for* them: for having exacted punishment of Him, who put Himself in their place, it cannot require the penalty of them also. Having received a full satisfaction from the Bondsman, it says of those for whom He was bound, 'Let 'these go free; I have no charge against 'them: justice demands their release.' And of such persons St. John expressly says, that "if they confess their sins, God will be *just* to forgive them their sins, and to cleanse them from all unrighteousness."

Further: the *truth* of God is *for* His

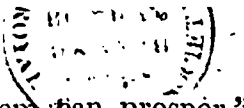
people. God is not a man, that He should lie; His word is unchangeable; He hath said, and will He not do it? Not one tittle of His word shall fail. But this attribute also was formerly *against* the persons of whom we speak; for formerly they were sinners, "*out* of Christ;" and of such He has solemnly declared, that "they shall not escape;" that "He will by no means clear them;" that "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but that the wrath of God abideth on him." But *now* "in Christ," what does the same word of truth declare respecting them? That "they shall never perish;" that "they shall be saved;" that "they shall have everlasting life;" that "their joy shall be full." Thus is the *truth* of God pledged in their behalf.

Once more: the *power of God* is "*for* His people." Who can declare His power? He is infinite in might. To Him, to will is to do; to speak is to perform. Who can withstand His arm? Who can resist His strength? Yet, great and glorious as is His power, it is all engaged on the side and in favour of His people. Every thing which a God of infinite and almighty power can do He will do for *them*. Every thing, in short, which His mercy may devise, His justice can demand, or His truth hath promised in their behalf, His power is pledged and will be

exerted to accomplish. In these respects, God is FOR His people; and such, then, is the *Ground* of that challenge which St. Paul here makes in their behalf.

We proceed to consider,

II. The Challenge itself: "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Here is the Challenge — *Who* can be against the people of God? *Against* them, indeed, as we have seen, there can and will be many. They have many obstacles in their way; many adversaries to oppose and assault them: but *who* can be against them, so as to prevail against them; so as in the end to defeat and destroy them; so as to prevent them from obtaining the victory, and attaining everlasting life? *Who* shall do these things? *Who* shall finally triumph over the people of God? *Who* can succeed against them? The challenge is universal; a defiance is given to the whole creation. Who shall prevail against them? Shall the combined power of men and devils; shall the world, with its temptations; shall the flesh, with its lusts; shall the men of this world, with all their opposition and hostility; shall principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world? Shall all, shall any of these prevail against the people of God? *Can* they possibly prevail against them? No: it is impossible: it shall not, it cannot be. "No



weapon formed against them can prosper." They shall surely in the end be more than conquerors over every foe. And why? For the reason which we have already noticed — because "God is *for* them." — "God is on their side: therefore shall they see their desire upon them that hate them." Observe, my brethren, the force of the argument here adduced.

What enemy can prevail against the people of God? God Himself is their protector and ally. "The Lord is their keeper. He is their shade upon their right hand." With His eye to watch over and direct them; with His arm to strengthen and defend them, how is it possible that they can be finally overcome? They may slip; but the Lord will sustain them. They may wander; but He will restore them. They may fall; but He will lift them up again. And *who* then can be against them?

What accuser can prevail against them? Conscience may accuse; the law may accuse; Satan may accuse. But God is their Judge; and He is already on their side. He has already decided for them. He has given sentence in their favour. "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions, for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." — "Who is he that condemneth? It is God that justifies."

In a word, my brethren, if that Mercy, which endureth for ever; if that Justice, which cannot be perverted; if that Truth, which is unchangeable; if that Power, which is Almighty;—if all these glorious attributes of the Godhead be *for* the people of God; be engaged on their side; be pledged in their favour;—*who* among all the enemies of their salvation can be against them, to any real, to any effectual purpose? We may dare, we may defy them all. We may challenge them to do their worst, without doubt or fear of the final result. "He that sitteth in heaven will laugh them to scorn: the Lord will have them in derision." He will uphold and strengthen His people with the right hand of His righteousness. He will put underneath them the everlasting arms. He will give His angels charge over them. He will subdue their iniquities. He will give them victory over the world. He will bruise Satan under their feet. He will redeem them from the power of the grave. He will put them in possession of the kingdom, prepared for them, promised to them, secured to them by the covenant and oath of Him, who is unchangeable and cannot lie. Behold the stability of the saints. The foundation on which their faith and hope are built. "If God be for them, who can be against them?"

And now, my brethren, let me briefly apply this subject for the consolation of those among you, to whom the consolation which it administers exclusively, indeed, but of right, belongs; to such of you as are now "in Christ Jesus;" who, having renounced the service and the ways of sin, have humbly fled to the Saviour of sinners for pardon and life; and in a daily dependance upon Him, and with a prevailing desire of pleasing Him, are "walking not after the flesh, but after the spirit." Now, it may often happen, that you stand in need of being comforted; and surely here is in the text an ample supply of consolation. At times, perhaps, you are oppressed with fears, and cast down through manifold temptations. You feel that your corruptions are strong, and that your graces are weak. You are sensible that your enemies are many and powerful, while your own strength is proved to be nothing. Your infirmities are great: your spiritual progress is slow. Nay, oftentimes you seem to gain no ground, and perhaps even to go backward in your heavenly course. In the experience of these things, your faith begins to be clouded: your courage fails you. You are tempted to think that your state is bad; that you shall never attain; that you shall one day perish; and all your past labour be in vain in the Lord. Have I not described what you sometimes

feel and fear? Well, then, dearly-beloved, at such seasons, and under such circumstances, cast your eye and your thoughts upon the text. Reflect on the comfort which it holds out to you; on the assurance which it gives you, that greater is He who is *for* you than they which are *against* you. Your enemies may be great and powerful; and your own strength may be perfect weakness; but *God* is *for* you: and *who* then *can* be against you? Who can prevail against you? Who in the end can frustrate your hope, or shut you out from the kingdom of heaven? If God does not shut you out, who can? If it is His good pleasure to give you the kingdom, who can deprive you of it? Can Satan deprive you of it? He is a vanquished foe: he was triumphed over on the cross. Can the world deprive you of it? Your Lord hath told you, "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Can sin deprive you of it? My brethren, sin *indulged* and *practised* will surely deprive you of it: but if you are *in Christ*, sin is not indulged and practised. It is dreaded, and hated, and denied by you: it does not *reign* in you, as it once did; and it never again shall have dominion over you; "for you are not under the law, but under grace." Be comforted; be encouraged; fight the good fight of faith, and hope unto the end. *God* is *for* you. His

perfections are all on your side: of whom are you afraid? They are promised, they are pledged, they are covenanted to save you to the uttermost. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; how shall He not with Him freely give us all things?" Bear constantly in mind the triumphant conclusion of the Apostle: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

And here I might finish my discourse, did I not feel myself constrained to say a few words to those here present (for I cannot but fear that there may be some), who know full well that the consolation of which I have been speaking does not belong *to them*; whose consciences bear witness with them, that as yet *they* are not "in Christ;" that they are walking not after the spirit, but after the flesh, and the world; and have nothing peculiar to Christianity belonging to them but the name. O my unhappy brethren,

(for such I must call you, so long as you continue in this state,) one thing is clear, *God is not for you.* He is not, He cannot be on your side. Nay worse, far worse than this, He is *against* you. He must be against you. You are provoking Him daily by your sins; you are slighting His Love and Mercy; you are setting His Power, Truth, and Justice at defiance; you are taking part with His enemies, siding with those who oppose and hate Him. And how is it possible but that He should be against you? Be assured that He is. But, my brethren, if God be against you, *who* then can be *for* you? Where will you find a protector or an ally, which shall shield you from His wrath? When He riseth up against you, who will be on your side to defend and shelter you? Recollect that He will be your Judge. You must stand before His judgement-seat to receive your final doom. But He has already pronounced it: He has decided against you. He has said that you will go away into everlasting punishment. *Who*, in that day, will be your advocate? *Who* will plead your cause? *Who* will put in an arrest of judgement? *Who* will stay the execution of the sentence, "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness?" No one *will*, no one *can* do these things for you: for God is *against* you, and *who* then can be *for* you?

O be warned in time. You had better have all the universe against you than God. Do I say this to alarm you? Yes: I would wish to alarm you: I would wish to break your false security: I would wish *to rouse you*, that I might rescue you; that I might be the blessed instrument, if God will, of bringing you to Christ, that so you may be saved. It is not yet too late to turn to Him, and through Him to seek your peace with God. No: it is for this purpose, this gracious purpose, that He is preached to you. He still calls you to Him, that your sins may be pardoned; your hearts may be made new; and your souls be for ever blessed. O turn not any longer away from Him who calleth you. Let Him not any longer say of you, "I have stretched out my hands all the day long to a rebellious and gainsaying people."

SERMON XXIII.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

ROMANS, viii. 16.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

THE subject to which this passage refers, is one of peculiar interest and importance: for the doctrine contained in it is calculated, when rightly understood, to afford real consolation to the humble and pious Christian. At the same time it is a subject, the discussion of which is attended with no little difficulty; for it is one that is often perverted, and becomes a source of error and delusion. May that blessed and holy Spirit, of whom the text speaks, assist our discussions, and lead us into all necessary truth on this and on every subject connected with our present peace and our eternal happiness!

It is the high and distinguishing privilege

of true Christians, that they are the children of God. "Beloved," says St. John in his first Epistle, "now are we the sons of God." God having fully pardoned, and freely accepted them for Christ's sake, adopts them into his family; gives them a name and a place among his children; and bestows on them the portion of children, a new heart here, and the promise of a glorious inheritance hereafter. Such is their privilege.

But it must be obvious that there is a wide difference between *possessing* a privilege, and *knowing* that we possess it. A man may have in law a clear title to an estate, without feeling sure in his own mind that he has such a title. He may possess a real interest in some very beneficial concern, and yet may be ignorant of his claim, or perhaps have considerable doubts as to the justness of his pretensions. Thus, for a man to be an adopted child of God through Jesus Christ, and at the same time to have a full and comfortable persuasion of his adoption, are in themselves two distinct and separate things. Nor are they things of *equal* importance to him. His salvation depends upon his adoption. If he be really a child of God, he will certainly be saved, whatever doubts, or fears, or misapprehensions he may have on the subject. But, on the other hand, though a clear and full persuasion of his being a child of

God be not *equally* important with the privilege itself; yet still it is a blessing, which it is of great consequence to him to possess. For such a persuasion will add greatly to his present peace, and comfort, and usefulness: insomuch that, in proportion to the measure of hope and assurance to which he attains on this point, he will be enabled to enjoy the happiness, and to adorn the profession of Christianity. From which statement it follows, that whatever tends to instil this persuasion into his mind, and to increase the hope and assurance of his adoption into the family of God, is a matter of no small moment to the real Christian: and hence, then, the importance and interest of the subject, which we are proposing to discuss, evidently appear; for it is this very point which the discussion will embrace and illustrate. The text discloses to us the way by which the true Christian may attain to a strong and lively hope of his adoption; namely, through the testimony of the Spirit. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Let the Christian receive this witness of the Spirit; and he need no longer to be in ignorance or doubt respecting his being a child of God. What, then, is this witness of the Spirit? How does He testify our adoption? In what way can we obtain through His testimony a persua-

sion, a hope, an assurance of our being indeed the children of God?"

In reply to these questions I shall set before you some distinct propositions which will serve to explain and elucidate the subject.

1. The first proposition which I shall state respecting the witness of the Spirit is this; that it is not, so to speak, the right and property of the people of God, to which they can lay claim, and which necessarily and of course belongs to them. It is a gift or privilege which the Spirit of God freely bestows on them; which He confers or withholds as He sees fit, in the dispensation of this gift, as in that of every other, "dividing to every man severally as He will." It is a privilege, therefore, which is far from being universally enjoyed. Some of the people of God may go mourning all their days, without having this witness to their being His children; and yet are no less His children all the time. Others may wait many years before they are favoured with it; while such as have enjoyed it for a season may afterwards lose it, and, for a time at least, may enjoy it no longer. Nor is the Spirit less free and uncontrolled as to the *degree* of testimony which He vouchsafes. To one He bears a weaker, to another a stronger witness. To some He so far evidences their adoption as to inspire

them with a comfortable hope; to others He testifies their sonship in so clear a manner as to fill them with the full assurance of hope: while to all He varies at times the measure and the strength of His testimony, — at one time not shining with so steady a light, nor speaking with so distinct a voice as at another; and thus teaching them all alike, that they are altogether dependant on His will for this as for every other operation of His grace; and must seek and wait for it with patience, faith, and prayer.

2. A second proposition which I shall offer respecting the witness of the Spirit is this; that it is a secret, inward operation of the Holy Ghost upon the heart of the true Christian. The language in the text demands this interpretation. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit." Here is the testimony of the Spirit concurring and agreeing with that of our own mind and conscience. Consequently the witness of which we are speaking is one which can be known only to the person to whom it is given. Others can neither understand it, nor judge of it. *They* have other means of deciding on his pretensions to be a child of God. By *his fruits they* shall know him. Of this inward testimony of the Spirit to his adoption they can know nothing. It is "the new name written on the white stone, which no man knoweth,

saving he that receiveth it." It is that "secret of the Lord which is with them that fear Him," when He shews them His covenant.

3. A third proposition respecting this witness of the Spirit is, that it perfectly agrees with the written word of God. The witness of the Spirit in the heart cannot contradict His witness in the word; for the Spirit cannot contradict Himself. His testimony must be one and the same. It must be according to truth, and "His word is truth." For instance, should a person pretend that the Spirit witnessed with his spirit that he was a child of God, while at the same time he exhibited not in his life and conversation those marks and evidences which are set forth in Scripture as distinguishing the children of God; would it not be plain that he was mistaken in his pretensions, and that what he supposed to be the witness of the Spirit was, in fact, no such thing? For could the Spirit witness to him a falsehood? Could it testify to him his adoption, when, so far from being a child of God, he was living in impenitence and sin? Could the Spirit say one thing of him, when the Scriptures said another? Could the Spirit tell him that he was accepted, when the word told him that he was condemned? No; their testimony must agree together. If two witnesses con-

tradict each other, their testimony is of no avail. But, as I before observed, these, in fact, are not two witnesses. The witness in the heart, and the witness in the word, is the same. It is the same Spirit which speaks in the heart and by the word. And let us then remember that the word, the written word, is the test and standard of truth. It is by the Spirit in the word that the spirit in the heart must be tried. When men talk of having the witness of the Spirit testifying with their spirit, we must say, "To the Law and to the Testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."

4. A fourth proposition which I would advance respecting the witness of the Spirit, and which is closely connected with the preceding remarks, is, that it has nothing to do with any sudden and violent impulse on the mind, nor any new revelation vouchsafed to it; that it does not consist in any sensible impressions, such as of a voice being heard in the ear, or of a text irresistibly forced upon the mind; much less that it has any connection with wild contortions of the body, or unnatural elevations of the voice. These things have been ignorantly adduced as operations of the Spirit of God, and as modes and proofs of *his* inward witness, when, in fact, they are rather to be considered as the

effects of a misinformed understanding, of a weak judgment, of an overheated imagination, or, perhaps, even of Satanic delusion. We must here again say, "To the Law and to the Testimony." Where do we find any passages of Scripture which give countenance to such follies and extravagances as these, or which teach us that the testimony of the Spirit is given in any of these ways, or is productive of any of these consequences? My brethren, let us endeavour to separate truth from falsehood; the wheat from the chaff. On the one hand, let us not deny or overlook the real operations of the Spirit of God; but, on the other hand, let us not blaspheme *Him*, nor bring *them* into contempt, by ascribing to His agency effects which are proofs of nothing but of error, weakness, or imposture. Religion is not promoted by being made ridiculous in the sight of the world; nor is the Spirit of God honoured and glorified when those who profess to experience his consolations express them in a way which tends to provoke censure, laughter, or disgust. There are two apostolic admonitions of very considerable importance which are too often overlooked by many pretenders to religion, "Abstain from all appearance of evil;" and "Let not your good be evil spoken of."

5. To these propositions already adduced,

respecting the witness of the Spirit, I will add one other, which will more distinctly shew the nature and mode of the testimony in question: — Wherever the Spirit bears witness to the adoption of sons, there He has been first received as the spirit of adoption. The connection of the text, with the passage in which it stands, proves the truth of this remark: for having said at the preceding verse, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father;" the Apostle immediately adds, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." Having first been received as a spirit of adoption, He thence becomes a Spirit to witness that adoption. Let me briefly explain this statement.

God, having freely pardoned sinners for Christ's sake, and having taken them into His family, and made them His children by grace and adoption, gives to them the Holy Spirit to dwell in them, and to work in them such tempers and dispositions as are adapted to the new state and relation into which they have been brought. Thus, they receive Him as the "Spirit of adoption." Under His heavenly teaching they learn to serve God as dear children, with filial reverence, confidence, and submission; to hate what

He hates; to love what He loves; and especially, to call upon Him as a Father for all they want; and, notwithstanding their conscious defects and unworthiness, to rely upon Him as such in all trials and difficulties. These are the tempers and dispositions which He works in them, as the Spirit of adoption; and here, then, we may see the way in which he bears witness to their adoption. He concurs with the testimony of their own conscience, as to their uprightness in embracing the Gospel, and their sincerity in giving themselves up to the service of God. He leads them to examine themselves concerning the reality of their conversion, and to compare their own hearts with the scriptural evidences of it; and while they are thus engaged, He, from time to time, shines upon His own gracious work, excites their holy affections into lively exercise, stirs them up into fresh acts of love and obedience, and thus puts the question of their adoption beyond all doubt. For while they feel the spirit of dutiful children towards God, they become satisfied concerning His fatherly love towards them. Enabled, at such seasons, to discern distinctly in themselves those scriptural marks, those spiritual fears and hopes, desires and purposes, which distinguish the children of God, they are enabled also to rest, and to rejoice, in the scriptural

conclusion, that if they are children, then God is indeed their Father.

Thus the Spirit bears witness with their spirit. This is His testimony to their adoption, and the way in which he bears it. And surely, there is nothing in this view and statement of the case, but what is rational, scriptural, and practical; nothing but what is perfectly consistent with reason rightly exercised, agreeable to Scripture, and conducive to holiness.

That it is a subject capable also of furnishing very ample consolation, who can doubt? For what consolation can be greater than that which ariseth from an assurance of our adoption into the family of God? How many of His children go mourning for want of this assurance? Exhibiting, it may be, to others, clear and decisive marks of their adoption; they can get no comfortable evidence to their own minds of this most interesting fact, and thus they go on from day to day, in a state of uncertainty and doubt, losing much of the comforts of religion, living far below their privileges, and reflecting a much less degree of credit on Christianity than they might otherwise do.

It is, then, with a reference to such of you, my brethren, as may answer this description, that I would frame my application on the present occasion. In the hope of admi-

nistering to you that consolation which the subject is capable of furnishing, I would begin with reminding you, that this consolation can be obtained only through the testimony of the Spirit of God. He it is, who "beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." You can have no clear and convincing evidence of your adoption, but such as he gives you, and enables you to receive. Let me inquire, then, do you in *this way* seek for the consolation which you need? Do you look for the testimony of the Spirit? Do you hope, and pray, that He will bear witness with your spirit, and thus will shed abroad in your heart a sense of the love of your heavenly Father? It is only in this way that you can scripturally hope to enjoy this privilege.

But again: while you thus seek the witness of the Spirit, are you expecting to receive it in a scriptural way? Have you right views and notions, that is, such as the word of God inculcates, respecting the nature and mode of this inward testimony? Are you looking for it to be given to you in some sudden, extraordinary manner, producing a violent emotion of the mind, and accompanied, perhaps, with circumstances little less than miraculous? I have shewed you that such expectations are not grounded on

Scripture; that they have nothing to do with the witness of the Spirit, which is of a very different kind; and which, instead of consisting in feelings and sensations, of which no rational account can be given, enables every one who is a partaker of it to "give a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear." If you would receive the Spirit as a witnessing Spirit, let me further remind you, that you must first receive Him as a Spirit of adoption. Before He can testify to you that you are a child of God, He must have wrought in you the dispositions of a child: for it is by shining on these, that He shews you your real state; and it is while you are examining into these, that you may expect Him to witness *your* adoption.

Come then, my brethren, let me lead you to this self-examination. Let me set before you some few of those scriptural marks, by which those who have received the Spirit of adoption are distinguished; and while I draw the picture, may the Spirit enable each of you to see that the likeness is your own, and so bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God!

The Apostle Paul, when speaking of the state of mind produced by the Spirit, as a Spirit of adoption, contrasts it with another state which he calls "A spirit of bondage;"

and it appears to me, that there is no better way of attaining the object which I have in view, than by making use of this comparison.

The spirit of bondage implies a state of servitude, and describes the religious condition of a large number of persons, whose religion is altogether of a servile nature, proceeding on servile principles, and conducted to servile ends. The persons in question have a certain persuasion of the truth of religion, and a certain conviction of its importance. They feel that they *ought* to serve God, and are sensible that they *must perish*, if they do not. They, therefore, set about to serve him; but it is altogether from a principle of fear. They have no *love* to His service: no inward delight in serving Him. Whatever they do, is from constraint, and not willingly; and if their heart were to follow its own bent and desire, they would, in fact, be serving some other master. For instance, they may desist from acts of gross and outward sin. They may leave off committing them; but they do not really dislike sin in their hearts. If they do desist, it is because they *must*, from the dread of the consequences, and not from any real distaste of the practice. They would indulge themselves in many things, if they *dared*. Again, they may perform many religious duties, but

they find the performance of them a hard task. They may go through them, like a work which they *must* perform, not like one which they have any pleasure in performing. They may come to church, and frequent the public worship of God; but it is not from any *pleasure* which they experience in the ordinances of religion. They are not *glad* when they go up to the house of the Lord; they look on their attendance there as a duty, not as a delight and a privilege. They observe the Sabbath, and keep it with a certain degree of strictness; but it seems to them a very long and tedious day. Their feeling throughout is, "O what a weariness is it?" When will the Sabbath be gone, that we may sell corn?" Are they called to endure privation or affliction? They submit, indeed, but with reluctance, and only because they cannot help themselves. 'God's 'will,' they say, '*must* be done; we *must* 'bear what He lays on us.' — In short, they look upon God as a hard master; whose commandments are grievous; whose service is painful; who demands of them more than they are willing to perform; but whom they dare not directly disobey and offend. Such is the religious state of many; a state of spiritual bondage. But very different is the condition of those who have received the Spirit as a Spirit of adoption. Compared

with this state of bondage, theirs is a state of freedom and liberty. They serve God, not of constraint, but willingly; not from a principle of fear, but out of love and complacency. In their judgment, they thoroughly approve of His holy law; and in their hearts they love His ways and commandments. His day, and His ordinances, are their delight. They submit to his will, not merely from necessity, but from choice. They acquiesce in his dispensations, from a conviction that they are the result and appointment of infinite wisdom and goodness. It is true, indeed, that they have *their* inward troubles and disquietudes; but they are of a very different kind from those which the spirit of bondage produces. They are indeed dissatisfied, but it is with themselves, not with the service required of them. They complain, not of the severity of the law, but of their own indisposition to obey it. They lament that they are not able to love, serve, and honour God, as they would wish to do. If they could, they would give Him their *whole* hearts, and would love and serve Him with *all* their souls. They murmur, not at their trials, but at their own impatience under them. They grieve, not at the length of the Sabbath, but at their own want of spiritual-mindedness to improve the holy rest vouchsafed by it. They do not say, even in their

hearts, 'O that this commandment were not 'so strict! — O that such a part of my duty 'were not required of me! Would that I might 'be allowed to indulge this or that inclina-'tion!' No: their secret language is of this kind; — 'O that my depravity were not so 'great! — that my corruptions were less! — 'that my heart were not so rebellious! — 'Would that I could always serve God in 'my spirit, and could love and obey Him as 'I ought!' Thus they consent to the law that it is good. In a word, they look on God, not as a hard master, but as a kind and gracious Father, who has justly a right to all their service, and all their love. This is the light in which they regard and esteem Him, and in which they *wish* to regard and esteem Him more and more. They lament (it may be) the coldness of their love, and the defectiveness of their service; but it is their prevailing *desire* to love and serve Him as a Father, with filial affection, reverence, and obedience. — Behold the Spirit of adoption. Whose hearts among you, my brethren, respond to this description? Who perceive in the picture, which I have been drawing, the lines and features of their own resemblance? Into whose sculs while I am speaking does the Spirit of adoption shine, and shew them that these dispositions, feelings, and desires have been wrought in them by His spiritual

agency alone? On whom does He softly and sweetly impress the comfortable persuasion, 'Thou art a child of God. Rejoice in 'thy privilege.' Receive the adoption of 'sons. Lift up thy voice, and cry, Abba, 'Father.

Oh! my brethren, may there be many among you to whom, at this moment, the Spirit of God testifies these things; with whose spirit he bears witness that they are the children of God!

With this testimony, this witness on your minds, may you go on your way rejoicing! May you henceforth enjoy the privileges, and abound more and more in the obedience of children! May your heavenly Father shed abroad, with increasing energy, His love in your hearts! and may you serve Him with augmented enjoyment and delight on earth, till you shall be translated to His kingdom and presence in heaven, and shall be put into full possession of that inheritance which He has prepared for all His children hereafter!

SERMON XXIV.

THE LORD'S DELIGHT IN HIS PEOPLE, AND HIS DESIGNS TOWARDS THEM.

PSALM cxlix. 4.

For the Lord taketh pleasure in his people: He will beautify the meek with salvation.

THIS psalm is a call to praise. "Praise ye the Lord," are the words with which it begins, and it has this circumstance peculiar to it, that while in the preceeding psalm, *all the works* of the Lord were excited to praise Him, in this the call is especially addressed *to His church.* "Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise in the congregation of the *Saints.* Let *Israel* rejoice in Him that made him: let the *children of Zion* be joyful in their King." But the same distinction, which marked the Jews under the old dispensation, still characterizes Christians under the new. *They* are in name and profession;

and, if real Christians, they are, in deed and in truth, the *Israel of God*, the *children of Zion*. As such let them "rejoice in Him that made them;" even in Him, who hath created them anew in Christ Jesus unto good works: let them "be joyful in their King;" even in Him, "who is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour;" and "hath all power in heaven and in earth," being made "Head over all things unto the Church."

In the text there are two Causes assigned, why the Saints should be excited to praise the Lord, and to be joyful in their King.

I. The Delight which He has in them, "The Lord taketh pleasure in His people."

II. His gracious Designs concerning them, "He will beautify the meek with salvation."

It is my intention to enlarge on these two points in the present discourse, for the sake of the consolation and instruction which they will furnish to the people of God. May His Spirit be present with us, and dispose *our* hearts to praise and joy!

Let us then consider

I. The Delight which the Lord has in the Saints. He "taketh pleasure in his people." In this statement there are three subjects for inquiry, namely,

1. *Who* are the Lord's people?
2. *Why* He takes pleasure in them?

3. *In what respects* He takes pleasure in them?

1. Who are the Lord's people? Many are the names and titles given to them in Scripture, and many are the marks by which they are described. We find one in the text, and to that we will now direct and confine our attention. It is contained in the second clause; but in this respect, so far as it is descriptive of the people of God, it equally belongs to the first. "He will beautify the meek with salvation." Now, the persons of whom it is here said, that "He will beautify them," are evidently the same, of whom it is before said, that He "taketh pleasure in them." Consequently those, who in the first clause are called "His people," in the second are called "the meek." Here then is a description of the Lord's people. They are "*the meek.*" And as it is a description very frequently given of them in Scripture, so it is one which very peculiarly marks them. That state and disposition of heart, which is comprehended under the Scriptural term "*meekness,*" is one, which singularly characterizes and distinguishes the true Christian. It, in fact, contains in itself a combination of graces, which are most evidently the fruit of the Spirit, and can grow on no other tree than on the Christian vine.

Let me explain this point. *Meekness*, as a Christian grace, may be considered as it respects both God and man. As it respects God, it implies poverty of spirit; humiliation of heart arising from a sense of guilt, and a feeling of corruption; submission and resignation to His will; silence and patience under His rod; acquiescence with His dispensations; and a surrender of our own natural desires and inclinations to His overruling appointments. As it respects man, meekness comprehends lowliness of mind, and a readiness to prefer others before ourselves; gentleness of disposition and behaviour; forbearance under provocations; forgiveness of injuries; quietness of spirit, and moderation in pushing forward our own interest and benefit. These are the qualities which distinguish *the meek*. Are not these, my brethren, the graces and tempers and dispositions which characterize and adorn true Christians? *They* are, in an especial manner, the "meek upon earth." In fact, there are, and can be, no others, to whom this title really belongs. No man in his natural state can be *meek*, in the scriptural sense of the word. Naturally he is proud, high-minded, self-sufficient, impatient, resentful, and rebellious. Even the renewed Christian, who is born again of the Spirit, and with his mind serves the law of Christ,—even he still finds

another law in his members; and too often has reason to lament that so much of the old nature still continues unmortified and unchanged in his soul. He still finds cause for complaining, that he is not *so* meek as he ought to be; and often, when he would do good, finds evil present with him. It is not, however, these lamentations and complaints; it is not the feeling of remaining corruption which inspires them, that need to deprive the persons in question of the comfortable hope that they are the Lord's people. Have they *some measure* of that meekness which I have been describing? Do they *grieve*, that their measure is at present so small? Do they long and pray for a larger increase of it? If this be the case with them, let them not be discouraged. They are the "meek hearted," and as such, are to be ranked among the people of the Lord, "in whom He taketh pleasure."

2. But *why* does He take pleasure in them? Do they *deserve* His favour? Have they done any thing to *merit* it? Is there any thing in them of *their own*, which He can regard with complacency and delight? No: they know and feel that they have no pretensions of this kind. The very sense which they have of their own unworthiness; that self-abasement and poverty of spirit which lies at the bottom of their character, and is

the source and spring of all their graces, would never allow them to believe that the Lord *can* "take pleasure in them," for their own sakes; for any thing which He finds and sees to be naturally in them. It is not for their sake, but for His own sake; for His name's, His truth's, and His mercy's sake, that He has now a favour unto them. The Lord "taketh pleasure in His people," because they are His people; those whom He has purchased by His blood, renewed by His Spirit, and redeemed by His power; those, whom, when they were afar off, He has made nigh; whom, when they were lost and straying in the wilderness, He has found and brought back on His shoulders rejoicing. He "taketh pleasure in them," because in them He is Himself honoured and glorified; because He sees in them the travail of His soul, the fruit of His suffering and mediation. He "taketh pleasure in them," because of the work which He has already begun in them; because they already exhibit some traces, however faint, of His own image; some transcript, however imperfect, of that mind which was in Him, who was "meek and lowly in heart." Yes, my dearly-beloved, that very humility of soul, that very lowliness of mind which leads you to think so unworthily of yourselves and to disclaim all pretensions to the Lord's favour and love, is

yet that very feature in your character which most endears you to Him; and for the sake of which He contemplates you with the greatest delight, even that "*ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which in His sight is of so great a price." Let us now then inquire,

3. *In what respects* the Lord takes pleasure in His people.—We are here entering on a wide field, much too wide for the limits of a single discourse; I will, therefore, only select two or three instances, which will illustrate and explain the subject.

First: the Lord takes pleasure in His people, inasmuch as He delights in the *exercise of their graces towards Him.*

They all *believe* in Him, and have *faith* in His word and promises; they *rely* on His truth and power; they *hope* in His mercy; they *fear* His displeasure; they *love* His person and name. Such are their feelings and affections towards Him; and these He regards with complacency and delight. In measure and degree, indeed, they may be far short of the standard to which they ought to rise: in the frequency and fervency with which they are exercised, they may be comparatively very defective and imperfect; but still they are the dispositions which He rejoices to see in them, and in which He delighteth; "The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in

His mercy." What complacency did He manifest towards the poor woman who showed her faith in Him, and her love towards Him, by washing His feet with her tears, and wiping them with the hair of her head! How graciously did He regard another poor woman, who came behind Him trembling, and touched the hem of His garment! There might be much ignorance, much infirmity in her manner of coming to Him: but He saw the secret feelings of her soul; He discovered the faith, and hope, and trust which glowed within; and He said unto her, "Daughter, be of good comfort; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague." Why does the Lord take pleasure in the prayers of His people, but because their prayers are expressions of their inward affections for Him, and of their secret dispositions towards Him? Oh! my brethren, what encouragement and consolation ought these reflections to give you! It may be, that you are often conflicting with trials, and are cast down at the thoughts of your infirmities; you lament the weakness of your graces, and are ready to conclude against yourselves that your very efforts to exercise faith, and hope, and love in your heavenly Redeemer, are, from their very imperfections, overlooked by him, and are perhaps even displeasing to Him. But how greatly are you mistaken! He delights in

these very efforts, feeble as they may be. He takes a pleasure in these graces, weak and defective as they may seem to you. He prizes them highly; He rejoices over them with joy; He listens with complacency to the broken prayer, and to the groanings which cannot be uttered; He counts your sighs; He puts your tears into his bottle; He places these things among His treasures.

Secondly: the Lord hath pleasure in *the services* of His people.

It is true, that they can do but little for Him; and that little is nothing worth. At the best, they can but render to Him of His own again; for they have nothing but what they have received, and their all they owe to Him. These considerations often cast them down, dispirit their exertions, and lead them to conclude, that as after all they must be unprofitable servants, so their services can be of no esteem and value in the Lord's sight. But here again they are mistaken. Their services are pleasing in His sight. He regards them, not with an eye to their intrinsic value in themselves, but for the sake of the willing mind from which they flow. He takes pleasure in their poor attempts to please Him, because they are attempts. He weighs not the worth or merit of the action, but the principle and motive from which it springs. Did He not graciously commend

the widow's mite? Did He not favourably receive the alabaster box of ointment which was poured upon His head, and even declare that this action, so expressive of respect and love to Him, should be recorded in all the world, as a memorial of her who had performed it? Has He not told us that a cup of cold water, given to a disciple in His name, shall not lose its reward? And can we suppose that He does not now look with favour and delight on those labours of love in His people, in reference to which He will *hereafter* say to them, "Well done, good and faithful servants: enter ye into the joy of your Lord?" But,

Thirdly: the Lord hath pleasure in the *prosperity* of his people.

His name is love; His nature is goodness; His mercy is over all His works: and can we doubt, then, but that He loves to see His people happy, and hath pleasure in their prosperity? Nay, we are expressly told that "He rejoiceth over them with joy;" that "He rejoiceth over them to do them good." Even in those dispensations, which in themselves are grievous and painful, He is seeking their good, and in the end promoting their happiness. "As many as He loves, He rebukes and chastens." He chastens them, "not for His pleasure, but for their profit." He afflicts them not willingly, and grieves

them not without good cause. "Yea, in all their afflictions He is afflicted;" and while He appoints the rod, He mingles mercies with His judgments.

What consolations do these reflections furnish to the *meek* and suffering servants of the Lord! Oh! "Thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted;" you are apt, it may be, in some gloomy moments to conclude that the Lord is against you; that He has forgotten to be gracious, and has shut up his tender mercies and compassions in displeasure from you. But it is not so. For a small moment He may have hid his face from you; but in great mercies will he gather you. If you are now in heaviness through manifold temptations, there is a need for it. Be assured, that notwithstanding present appearances, He taketh pleasure in your *prosperity;* and that whenever the clouds can be removed with safety and benefit to yourself, they will be all driven away. It may be "the time of Jacob's trouble: but he shall be saved out of it." The Lord still remembereth you with the favour which He beareth unto His people. He will visit you with His salvation. You shall see the good of His chosen, and shall rejoice with the gladness of His people, and shall glory with his inheritance.

From this view of *the Delight* which the

Lord taketh in His people, let us now consider,

II. His *gracious Designs* concerning them. It is expressed in these words, "He will beautify them with salvation." The Lord designs not only to save His people, but also to adorn and honour them. Those "whom He justifies, them He also *glorifies*." He "will *beautify* them with salvation," which is a promise, relating both to the present life and to the future one.

1. To the present life.

It is the purpose of God to *beautify* His people with salvation in this world.

There are many passages in the Scripture which intimate this purpose, and lead us to this view of the happy effects of religion, even in the present life. When the prodigal returned home to his father's house, contrite, penitent, and reformed, he was not only received with kindness, assured of forgiveness, and welcomed as a son, but he was also *adorned* and *beautified*. "His father said to the servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet." So in the forty-fifth Psalm, in which the union betwixt Christ and His people is figuratively represented by that which takes place between the bridegroom and his bride, His church, that is the bride, is thus described:—"The King's daughter is

all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needle-work." — "So shall He greatly desire thy *beauty*." And St. Paul, using on the same subject the same figure of speech, says, "Christ loved His church and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a *glorious* church, not *having* spot or wrinkle, or any such thing."

But what is the glory, the beauty, which is here meant in these passages, with which Christ will adorn and beautify His people? It is holiness. Do we not read of the "beauty of holiness?" When the church is a glorious church, then she is "*holy* and without blemish." It is by the graces of the Holy Spirit that she is beautified and made meet for the marriage supper of the Lamb. In a passage to which reference has been already made, we have seen that the meek and quiet spirit by which the Christian is distinguished is an *ornament* to him; and we read in another place, that he is *adorned* with good works. It is the great object of the Gospel to *sanctify* all who embrace it; to renew them by the Holy Ghost in the spirit of their minds; to restore them to the image of God which they have lost through sin. And it is this renewing and sanctifying of

their natures which constitutes their glory; that glory, with which it is the purpose of God in a measure to *beautify* them, even in this life. The world, indeed, can see nothing of this glory. The carnal mind can discern no beauty in holiness. The image of God presents no charms to the natural man. Let us remember, that even the brightest, purest exhibition of it, which ever appeared on this earth, offered no attractions to those who witnessed it. Though displayed in the person and character of our blessed Redeemer, yet in the eyes of the Jewish people, "He had no form nor comeliness: and when they saw Him, there was no beauty that they should desire Him." In truth, it was the very holiness of Christ, the purity of His life and doctrine, which stirred up their enmity, and caused His death. It is no wonder then, if the carnal mind, which was so offended with the divine and beautiful original, should see no beauty in those who exhibit some trace and resemblance of it. But notwithstanding the neglect, contempt, or hatred of an ungodly world, there is no object more *beautiful* on this earth, — the object which angels admire, and in which God delighteth, — than the meek, and humble, and spiritually-minded Christian. See him, in the midst of conflicts and perils, relying on the promises and power of his gracious Redeemer; weak in himself,

but strong in the Lord; wars without, and fightings within, yet in patience possessing his soul; against hope believing in hope; denying himself; crucifying the flesh; forbearing and forgiving under injuries and wrongs; consecrating his time and his talents to the glory of Christ, and to the good of mankind; using the world without abusing it; diligently and faithfully occupied in his station, but having his eye, his heart, and his treasure in heaven; meekly, and silently, carrying his cross, and quietly waiting for the coming of his Lord. Look at this sight, and while you contemplate the most lovely object which this earth can offer to your sight, see the Lord's Designs respecting His people in this world, when He says, "I will beautify them with salvation."

We may now consider this promise, secondly, as it relates to the future world.

Lovely and glorious as are the saints on earth, yet still it must be confessed, that their beauty here falls far short of the perfection to which it will attain hereafter. They are now renewed but in part; infirmity and imperfection still cleave to them. They have indeed the mind which was in Christ; but they find still a law in their members warring against the law of their mind. The pure gold is still mixed with much base alloy; but it will not be so hereafter. They are

"predestinated to be conformed to the image of the Son:" and when they awake up in another world, it will be after His likeness, without any remaining blemish, defect, or spot. They will then be perfect in holiness, holy as God is holy, and pure as Christ is pure: "though they have lain among the pots, yet shall they be as the wings of a dove, covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold." Carry forward your thoughts, my brethren, to the morning of the resurrection; to the dawn of that glorious day, when the saints shall awake to everlasting life; when this corruption shall have put on incorruption, this mortal immortality; when the body, raised in honour and glory, shall be clothed in its beauteous apparel, and being made like unto Christ's glorious body, shall shine as the sun in the firmament; when now once more united to its kindred and sanctified spirit, it shall no longer be a weight, and a clog, and a hinderance, but become a furtherer of its joy, and a sharer and a helper in its spiritual happiness. This is the meaning of the Apostle, when he speaks of Christ's coming "to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." This is the meaning in the text, when it is said that the Lord will *beautify* His people. This is the beauty which He has designed for them, and

for which He is now preparing them. This is the beauty which every dispensation of His providence is tending to work out for them: nor will His gracious designs respecting them be fully accomplished, till every one of them, thus all beauteous within and without, shall be presented faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy."

Such is the Delight which the Lord taketh in His people: such are His Designs respecting them. In the contemplation of these things, with reason may it be said to them, "Praise ye the Lord." — "Let Israel rejoice in Him that made them. Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King." Joy and gratitude, praise and thanksgiving, well become the people of the Lord. My dear brethren, ye who know the Lord, praise the Lord. In the midst of your tribulations, rejoice. You have no reason to be sorrowful, no cause to be cast down, even under present afflictions. They are all working together for your good; they are all sent to administer the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Bear in mind, that the Lord taketh pleasure in you, in your prayers, your services, and your prosperity. Bear in mind, the gracious designs which He entertains towards you. He will beautify you with salvation. Here, He will make you glad with

the joy of His countenance; hereafter, He will glorify you with Himself in heaven. Be patient, therefore, brethren, till the coming of your Lord. Watch, and keep your garments. Be diligent to be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless. And may the God of peace be with you, preserve you by His power, and fill you with all peace and joy in believing, for Jesus Christ's sake!

THE END.

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